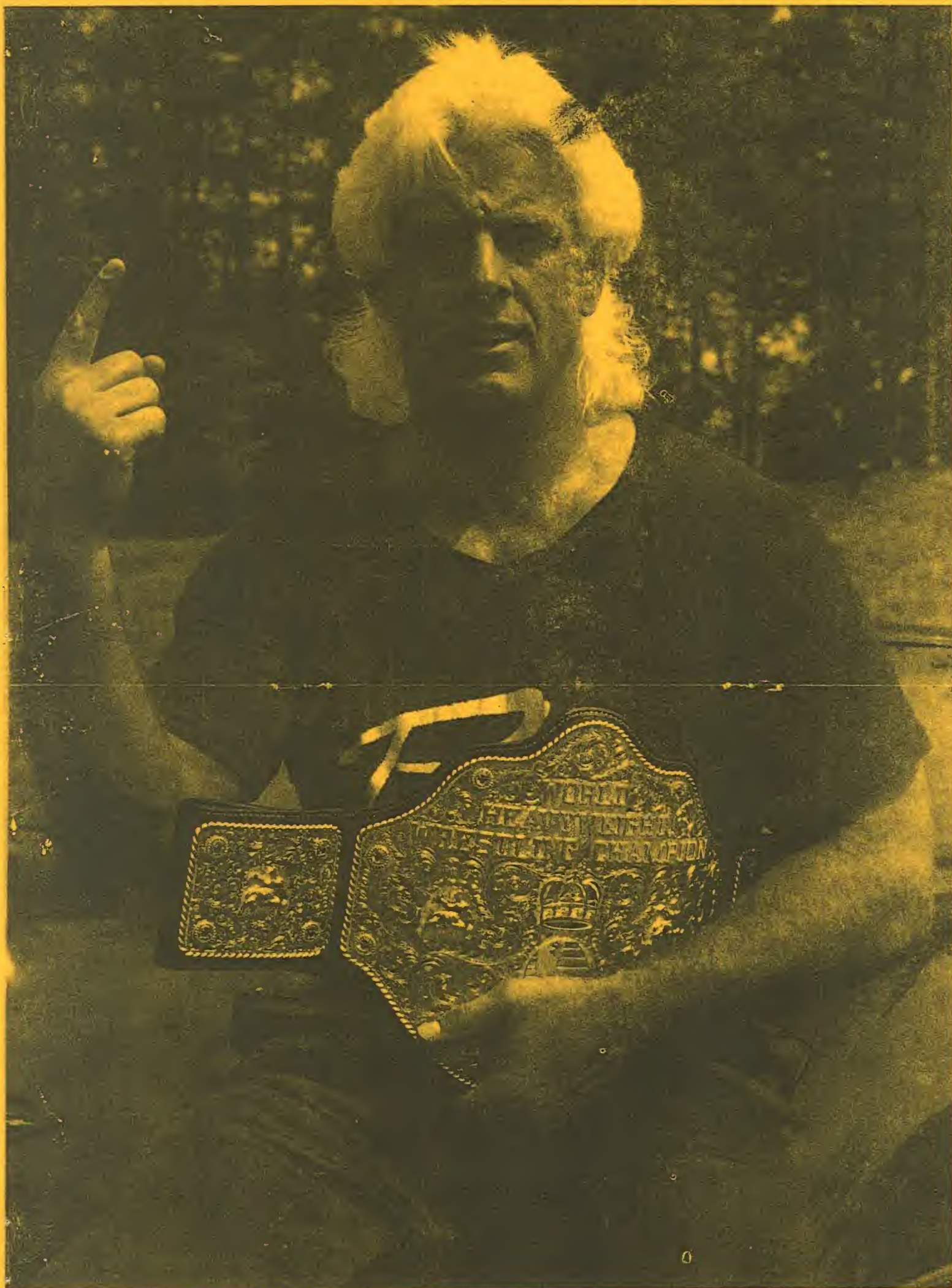


WRESTLING OBSERVER

1986 YEAR BOOK



RIC FLAIR
6 TIME WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

EDITORS' NOTES

THANK YOU. That's about the best thing I can start off with as we put the finishing touches on the 1986 Yearbook and head into covering the mat scene for another year. As far as this newsletter goes, 1986 was a tremendous year. We've basically gone in the last 12 months from being an underground wrestling publication to being one of the most respected mat publications in North America.

It's because of each and every one of you that this has been possible. From the greatest set of correspondents in the world to some very loyal readers, who have stuck with this thing through thick and thin.

As 1987 approaches, my goals for the Observer are the same as they've been since we started more than five years ago. I want the Observer to specifically be an accurate portrayal of the pro wrestling business--the good, the bad, the funny, the sad and the ugly. I, and every reader of this, is either a fan of the business, or someone that works within the business. This business is a source of income to some very good friends of mine, and a source of entertainment for the rest of us. At the same time, I don't want to be swayed by that. When this started, we were a group of fans and readers, totally detached from the business and trying to follow a crazy, fun and often frustrating business.

Things have changed a lot. In many ways for the better. Our accuracy has improved quite a bit, although it'll never be up to the standards I'd like. The nature of the beast doesn't allow it. The best I can do is repeat once again, that if anything in here is in error, please contact me and we'll get it straightened out. It's easier being opinionated about something you are detached from, but I'll do my best to be as honest

with my opinions and reporting as possible.

For this publication to stay fresh, we need reader input. In that way, this has been a tremendous year. The awards balloting in this issue is comprised of results from more than 325 readers--roughly double the previous record.

For people who are reading the Observer for the first time, this is the special yearbook edition. I'm sending this to new readers, because it's a special issue, instead of a four issue subscription. The Observer is a weekly publication, 8-10 pages, covering the latest in wrestling happenings. A four issue set is \$5, with subscriptions available in increments of four issues, such as 12 issues for \$15, 20 issues for \$25, through 40 issues, or roughly a 10 month subscription, for \$50. The Observer also publishes several special issues, such as this. Additional copies of this yearbook are available for \$7.50, and extras have been printed up but they may not last long. We also have a 150 page booklet, called Who's Who in Wrestling, probably the single most controversial publication ever written on the business, for \$15 for subscribers and \$17.50 for non-subscribers. The Who's Who has real names, legitimate background, ages, aliases, etc. on more than 340 of today's leading pro wrestling personalities.

Now that business is taken care of--check the mailing label on this issue. If you don't have a number in parenthesis by your name, it means this is the last issue of the Observer on your subscription. To renew, send \$5 for each set of four to the Observer at 302 East Hawkeye Avenue #356, Turlock, CA 95380. For first-time readers who have ordered one set, I thought you'd enjoy getting a copy of the special issue, so your subscription will actually expire with this issue.

The list of people to thank here as we finish the yearbook is endless. Special thanks to everyone who filled out a ballot and made this issue possible. Extra special thanks to Mr. Mike, who has provided us all with insight and laughs, on-and-off, for several years now. I also want to thank Bob Matthews of the Rochester Times-Union and WHAM Radio for all the help in this past year along with the folks at Wrestling Eye magazine, particularly Ed Garea. Hey, I don't like the magazine, but they have been a big help. Thanks to Susie Livingston for putting up with this for the past year; to some great new correspondents and good friends like Mike Gunter and Jeff Bowdren; to long-time friends like Robert Hernandez; to all the folks within the business who make it what it is, and to everyone else reading this that I haven't mentioned.

I was planning on announcing the winner of our Wrestling trivia contest in this issue, but I've been so busy that I haven't gotten around to researching a certain question which, in fact, will decide the contest. I've got an expert on the field at it as you read this, and hopefully will announce the winner within two weeks.

We have another trivia question in here, which I don't expect anyone to get. I'll give the answer to the quiz in three weeks, and if anyone can actually get the answer, they'll receive a free four issue subscription. Believe me, this one I couldn't have gotten in a million years.

I was planning a tirade here about a certain wrestling magazine which used material from here, word-for-word. Anyway, a threatening letter has been sent. It's a totally hypocritical attitude for me to say wrestling magazines shouldn't be printing inside info. I just wouldn't do it personally. At the same time, those that do should be a whole lot more responsible about what they print, and a lot more consistent with their policy.

WRESTLING UPDATE

Three major stories headline this week's mat news. Two of them come out of Dallas' World Class office. The long-expected switch of bookers has been finalized, and George Scott will be leaving, probably before you read this, and be replaced by wrestling's only masked booker, Red River Jack (Bruiser Brody to you and me). Whenever there is a change in bookers, you can generally expect a great deal of housecleaning and talent turnover. In the case of World Class, that has to be a plus. From the Brody side, this will almost certainly cut down on his nationwide travel schedule, which means planned stints in places like Montreal, Florida, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and other smaller independents will have to be either cut way down, or eliminated. It's pretty well known Brody was about to become the No. 1 babyface in Florida with the departure of Lex Luger, but I guess that stint is somewhat out the window.

As previous bookers have found out, however, being a booker for World Class is like being a manager of a baseball team with a general manager who really calls all the shots. Now Brody has been with Fritz Von Erich for more than a year now, which sometimes seems like a record for both of them. However two guys with ultra-strong personalities working together can always have its down side. And in some ways Brody's hands are tied, because the Von Erichs, including Lance, are tied to the promotion, they always have to be pushed, and it's very difficult, nee impossible to have them do angles where they bleed. In addition, for marketing reasons, both Dingo Warrior and Steve Simpson have to be retained, and pushed (which explains why they never let Bam Bam Bigelow beat up on Simpson). This gives you six babyfaces who are poor workers, five of which don't have any drawing power (Kerry Von Erich still has the potential to be a top draw, but it's yet to be seen if he, like Mike, as a shadow of what he once was, will work to depress fans and actually keep them away). In fact of the six, Dingo, and on rare occasions Kevin, are the only ones who can even do a decent interview. And as attendance figures point out vividly, starting point here is rock bottom.

As with most new bookers, things probably will pick up. Brody has been around a long time, and is somewhat of a legend in the dressing room, so there are guys who may come in here that won't work anywhere else. Several names have already been speculated on like Stan Hansen, John Nord (word has it he turned down the Crockett stint because he claims Dusty promised him one week off per month, then when the schedule came back, the week off had been forgotten) and Terry Funk. I'd rather not think about the prospects of Kevin vs. Nord, but against Brody, all three have the potential to liven things up. Now this is all speculation, as best as I know, none of these names is even close to agreeing to come here. As booker, one can expect Red River Jack to be the babyface on top, which makes a big brawler like Hansen or Nord a fresh opponent.

The other big story out of Dallas is that Kerry Von Erich will wrestle on the 2/2 card at Fort Worth's Tarrant County Convention Center against Brian Adias. Now just one week ago I spoke to World Class' chief syndicator and he said they were hoping on Kerry to be returning by the Cotton Bowl card in October. I don't know what to make of this, although I'm told Kerry still can't walk very well. I realize you don't have to be able to walk well to be able to get into the ring, but it helps. Kerry did jump into the ring on Christmas and did a few moves on Adias, so I guess they're confident they can get him through a match. Make no mistake about it, this card should draw very well because of the comeback story. The Fantastics and the Rock'n'Roll RPM's (Mike Davis & Tommy Lane) will wrestle each other on the card as well. I'm told that at present, both are booked for one date only, although I suspect the promotion will try and bring the Fantastics in full-time. The Fantastics were pretty much unhappy about the last time they came through here, but they did get over very well (they were the first Rock'n'Roll tag team in the market--the first time usually works well) and seemingly have nowhere else to go and retain the tag team.

The third major story comes from the not-so-friendly skies. Jim Neidhart was arrested this past Thursday (1/15) after a flight from Tampa to Pittsburgh. This story should sound quite familiar. According to news reports, Neidhart hit a stewardess five to seven times in the arm allegedly because she refused to serve him any more drinks. The FBI was radio'd and was waiting in Pittsburgh when they touched down. Neidhart was taken in and had to miss his 1/15 date in Struthers, Ohio but was later released on \$10,000 bond and started back on tour with his 1/16 booking in Pittsburgh. He has a hearing scheduled on 1/29. Originally he was to be banned for all domestic flights, but since that would force him to find a new employer and interfere with his chances to make a living, that order was rescinded.

For those who are seeing the Observer for the first time, a typical weekly issue consists of 6-8 news pages like this, at least two pages of reader feedback and occasionally a feature.

Ironie story of the week. Do you realize when Seiji Sakaguchi tries to book talent from the World Class office for Japanese tours, who will he have to directly deal with?

UWF: Sam Houston is scheduled to start up here on 2/5 with Chris Adams getting out of prison and returning about a week later. Barring legal problems, John Tatum may be back as early as the middle of March. They are going to need all these guys because Terry Gordy, Steve Williams and Rick Steiner will all be on Japan tours starting the last week of February through most of March. Williams and Steiner will work for Inoki, and may wind up being one of the two or three best foreign tag teams that work Japan. . . The 2/24 Denver date was canceled because Williams, who grew up in the Denver suburb of Lakewood, Colo., will be in Japan, and because the TV show will be pre-empted four times in the six weeks leading to the card because of the CBS affiliates basketball commitments. . . 1/12 in Kansas City drew 6,000 fans and \$30,000 which is pretty impressive since two weeks earlier, Titan had to cancel a Ricky Steamboat vs. Randy Savage card because of a non-existent advance sale, and Crockett's show on 1/9 drew a \$1,900 gate. . . 1/9 in Houston drew 4,000 and \$35,000 as One Man Gang beat Jim Duggan in a chain match, Ted DiBiase & Williams beat Gordy & Michael Hayes in a Bad Street Match, Savannah Jack pinned Sting to keep the TV title, Terry Taylor pinned Eddie Gilbert and Chavo Guerrero downed Jack Victory. On paper the 1/23 show looks weak, with DiBiase vs. Hayes in a match with DiBiase's glove on a pole, Williams vs. Angel of Death, Missing Link vs. Leroy Brown and Guerrero vs. Buddy Roberts. . . Gordy blew out his knee about 10 days ago and apparently there was some pretty severe ligament damage. If you saw either of the TV shows over the weekend, you'll see how stiff his left knee was and he's wearing a brace on it. Apparently doctors have recommended major surgery as they feel they can't fix it up with arthroscopic surgery. When the doctors informed Gordy that he'd be out six months to a year with major surgery, he informed the doctors that his leg all of a sudden wasn't hurting that bad. . . The UWF TV show will be taped on 1/25 in Oklahoma City, instead of in Tulsa. . . The 1/10 Power Pro tapings in Fort Worth drew 1,800. The first hour (which aired this past weekend) saw Guerrero & Williams beat Gordy & Angel of Death via DQ in what I'm told very a first-rate bout. Second hour was headlined by The Fantastics & Guerrero beating Victory & Art Crews & Mike George when Chavo used a new spectacular somersault type finisher on George, while the Missing Link-Michael Hayes match (to set up Dark Journey and Sunshine as a feud) ended when Gordy and Angel of Death interfered and Gordy really smacked Link with a chair. The chair wound up with a huge dent. . . Dark match from that show had Gang beat Duggan in a cage match, and a pitiful match at that. . . The 1/11 Tulsa taping drew 4,000. I was pretty disappointed with the first hour, which aired this weekend. They hyped three matches, none of which took place. I realize they had angles stem from all three non-matches, but by the third match they did this, it was a bit much. Taylor & Duggan were to defend the tag title against Gordy & Roberts, but Gang, Akbar, Bill Irwin and Eli the Eliminator (who obviously will be replacing Leroy Brown as Irwin's partner) attacked Duggan & Taylor and bloodied them so they couldn't wrestle. Hayes demanded the belts, but Ken Mantell came out and said since the UWF doctors examined Taylor & Duggan and said they couldn't wrestle, the bout would have to be postponed. If you recall, this was very similar to the Gordy-Gang title switch, and with rationale being since Gordy wouldn't let the UWF doctors examine him, his match was forfeited, rather than postponed. In some ways I think this was done so UWF could further explain its somewhat controversial singles title change. Then Hayes was to wrestle Savannah for the TV title, and all the Birds jumped Savannah and Hayes stole the belt before the match ever got started. The other main event was to be a lumberjack match with Missy Hyatt and Dark Journey. Hyatt supposedly broke her thumb so the match never took place, tho they did have a brawl in the ring ending with Journey KOing Missy with her own purse. For some reason, the execution in all three of these angles, maybe because there were three, seemed contrived rather than spontaneous. Best line of the show was when Gilbert was talking about Missy's injury and said "I'd never lie," Jim Ross responded by saying, "I can see his nose growing." . . . Duggan and One Man Gang meet in a loser leaves town match on 1/23 in Jackson, Miss. Duggan and the Fantastics will be gone as of the 1/25 Oklahoma City taping and I suspect Duggan will start with Titan at the 1/26 taping in Tampa. By the way, most folks seem to think Duggan won't get over that big with Titan, but from what I've heard, Titan is going to be giving Duggan a big push, and he'll be a babyface.

Titan: Besides Duggan, also heading to this area is Barry Darsow, better known as Khrusher Khrushchev. He's going to be one of the Demolition tag team. I've heard two stories, and we'll have to wait and see which one is true. The first is that Darsow will team with Bill Eadie as the Demolition, and that Randy Culley will then go back to being a Moondog. The second is that the Demolition is going to become a three-man team, of Eadie, Culley and Darsow. Actually Culley & Eadie look more like Lord Humongous types than Road Warrior types to me. I didn't see the show over the weekend, but I'm told by those who did and also were at the Meadowlands, that they do

funny things with the mixing and sweetening of the crowd noise. At the show live, the crowd was dead quiet in some of the matches but sounded loud and rowdy over the air. They aren't the first to do it, and let's face it, these guys are the masters at all forms of manipulation. I assume Darsow will be in for the Florida tapings and in three weeks we'll see how and what the Demolition tag team becomes. One thing pretty well certain, neither they nor Outback Jack are going to get over. . . I'm not sure what this says about our society, but on 1/19--a national holiday for Martin Luther King's birthday, Hulk Hogan and Kimala will meet in a sold out Madison Square Garden. The advance for this show was the best for any MSG show in more than a year, as 19,000 tickets were sold as of 1/16 so it probably sold out two days or so in advance. . . King Kong Bundy is now down to 350 pounds. He wanted to get down to 280, however if he did, he'd no longer be King Kong Bundy, so to keep his gimmick, he has been advised not to lose too much more weight. . . Titan had its first card in the heart of Crockett territory in a long-time on 1/17 as they booked Hogan and Kimala in Winston-Salem, telling area fans it was their first chance to see the true World champion. They probably drew okay, because in this day and age, I don't think there's anywhere, except possibly Dallas, where Hogan couldn't draw. . . Dynamite Kid was released from the hospital in Calgary on 1/12. His doctor said under normal circumstances, an athlete would never be able to return, but that the Dynamite Kid isn't a normal athlete. Dynamite will "definitely" be back for Wrestlemania. He's aiming right now at being back early in March, but my guess is they'll advise him to lay off and he won't return until the big show. He's going to have lots of problems when he returns, however. Since Dynamite is a Natural 175-pounder, pumped up to around 215, since he probably won't be able to do any kind of serious weight training, and I'd hope he wouldn't take steroids at this point, it'll be virtually impossible for him to get his bulk back. At the same time, because of the back problems, he's no longer going to be able to do the flying stuff or take the big bumps anymore, and will be limited to mainly being a brawler--punches and kicks. I don't know how Titan, and the big Titan wrestlers, will take to a 180 pound man who doesn't take bumps (so won't do any hard-selling) being able to beat up the giants purely through punching and kicking. Basically Davey Boy is going to have to carry the team and Dynamite will be limited to hot tags. Dynamite is also talking of retiring in two years. . . 1/7 in Glens Falls, N.Y. drew 4,500 as Dick Slater won a bunkhouse stampede and also pinned Bob Orton on the undercard, Roddy Piper pinned Adrian Adonis, Jacques Rougeau double count out Jim Brunzell and a bunch of others. Before losing to Ron Bass, Lanny Poffo, in his poem, called Adonis "a repulsive queer." . . . Speaking of Slater, there are rumors everywhere of him looking for work elsewhere, which shows in some cases ego is more valuable than money. . . How's this for overkill. In Richmond, Va. at noon on Saturday, there are two Titan shows and one Crockett show all in the same time slot. . . 1/30 at the Nassau Coliseum has Piper vs. Adonis with Andre as ref, and Mulligan vs. Bundy. . . They are trying to run Piper-Adonis along with the Battle Royals because on its own, the feud has flopped. Titan's brass is perplexed about that one. Do you realize that only three months ago, people actually thought Piper would overtake Hogan as Titan's leading drawing card. Now, Roddy is fixing to be moved to a middle-of-the-card performer. . . Bruno Sammartino and a Bunkhouse Stampede drew 13,067 in Boston on 1/3. I believe Bruno and Randy Savage meet in a lumberjack match here in February. That crowd is more than double what Boston has been averaging of late (I'm told most crowds have been 4-5,000 although Hogan's most recent appearance drew 10,000). Also am told Bruno positively won't wrestle again after his birthday in October. . . Another strange thing is in February they are running Hogan-Kimala matches along with Savage-Steambot on the same cards--their two top angles. What does that leave the other cities with since the Piper matches are generally disappointing? . . . 1/16 in Pittsburgh drew 8,000 as the Bees beat Muraco-Orton (best match), Savage beat Steambot via DQ, Mulligan pinned Volkoff in seconds, and Smith-Kirchner beat Hart-Neidhart with Davis as ref. 2/13 has Savage vs. Steambot, Hernandez vs. Haynes, Orndorff vs. Ware and an interesting tag match has The Islanders against Kimala & Sika. Interesting because I'm pretty sure that Sika is actually the father of "Tama" or Tonga Kid--at least that's what Sam Fatu says. . . 1/13 in Fresno drew 4,500 (\$54,000) as Honkeytonk DCCR Steele (awful), Bundy pinned Morales (Pedro had juice on him by accident), Savage beat Steambot via DQ in 7:40 (good, but should have been better), Butch Reed beat Jake Roberts via COR after they threw the bag hard off the apron the floor and Jake jumps out to check on his pet--told they're getting very much out of control here and the SPCA should be alerted--Jake is over big as a babyface but Reed is one of Titan's laziest, Martel-Zenk beat Valentine-Beefcake. Next show is 2/8 with Junkfood & Steele vs. Race & Orndorff plus a Battle Royal. I'm glad I'm staying home that night. . . 1/11 in Toronto drew a sellout of 17,500 as Hogan beat Kimala in the cage match, Roberts DCCR Bundy, Smith-Junkfood beat Hart-Neidhart, Muraco drew Ware, Valentine-Beefcake beat Rotundo-Spivey and Steele beat Johnny V via DQ when Honkeytonk pulled the old broken arm trick. . . 1/12 in London drew 3,700 as Smith-Junkyard beat Muraco-Orton, Haynes beat Race via DQ and working prelims on the card were

both Tom Magee and Outhouse Jack. Outhouse apparently will work around the horn with Barry C, who is Titan's best prelim jobber. . . Did you notice how pathetic Andre looks on his TV appearances? He needs a backbrace just to get around. He was walking upright for the first time in a long while. I just hope Savage and Steamboat are into having a hot match, because that card is going to need a saving grace. There's no doubt that so long as Titan doesn't get out-of-control with expenses, Wrestlemania should be profitable because Andre vs. Hogan will draw big. As for as long-term cost-effectiveness, well, we'll have to wait to see just how far gates fall in the month before and months after. Titan has learned from its mistakes, I've heard they aren't going to run any shows in the U.S. until late April, concentrating on foreign tours instead. . . Meadowlands tapings drew 15,826 (\$187,512).

Crockett: A couple of injury updates before we get going. Wahoo McDaniel has been out for the past month or so due to rotator cuff (shoulder) surgery. He's supposed to be back within about a month. Magnum T.A. has been making excellent progress which is why they've started talking about him again so much on television. He can now walk in water and stand up for two minutes at a time under his own power. I believe he even went to a basketball game about a week ago. Apparently one side of his body is responding faster than the other side, however. . . Lex Luger debuted on WTBS this past weekend and starts here full-time in about a week. The original angle has been slightly altered. If you recall a few weeks ago J.J. and Tully were talking about a surprise they had, which was to be Luger. I believe they've changed it to make it look like Luger wanting to be a member of the four horseman was a surprise at the insistence of those in the wrestling media who would be at a loss for a logical explanation why, without any reason, Luger, the most overpublicized rookie since the Road Warriors (and most marketable) would suddenly want to align himself with Flair. They even acknowledged Luger and Windham's former tag team. Acknowledging other promotions' angles is something the big guys like Crockett and Titan under normal circumstances would never do. I have no idea what the status or future of Ole Anderson is, other than at one point he definitely was going babyface but now I have no idea. Most of Luger's first important matches will be in 6-mans with Ole & Arn so I suspect they'll use them to both hide Luger, and to eventually, if/when Ole loses, to do a change. . . Did you catch Dusty trying to make fun of Titan's cage match rules? When Dusty wrestles Big Bubba on 2/27 in Pittsburgh in a cage match, the rules are that the first person out of the cage is the loser--which actually makes more sense but why talk sense when you talk wrestling. Wonder how many fans will pick up on that, however. . . Three weeks ago, when the Rock'n'Roll Express Fan Club commercials started on the air, one friend of mine called me almost immediately and said this was going to backfire. The last thing guys, who find it easy to hate Rock'n'Roll anyway, want to see is pushing Morton as a rock star and a heartthrob in those commercials. I passed it off, having seen how "over" these guys are, saying nothing is going to make people dislike them. Well, obviously I was wrong. In almost every city Morton & Gibson have appeared in since the commercial aired, save within the Carolinas/Virginia territory, the fans, particularly the guys in their 20s which make up the core wrestling fan audience, are booing these guys--against Russians, Andersons, whatever. I figured the act just didn't play in San Francisco, but instead, it's that commercial and fan club have backfired. . . Road Warriors are headed to Japan in late February, and there is a strong rumor they'll actually be signing a contract upon their return. They might as well, because except for Japan, they aren't working anywhere else anymore. This also enables Crockett to sell Road Warrior merchandise, which is going to be one lucrative business. I finally figured out why those Nikita shirts sold so well when he was a heel. Apparently since they couldn't sell Road Warrior shirts, the same type of fan that would want a Roadie shirt figures Nikita (whose shirts they had already) is the next best thing. Since Nikita's shirts sold so well, that's the main reason they turned him. . . 1/11 at the Omni drew a \$30,000 gate (just under 3,000) as Pez Whatley beat Vernon Deaton, Brad Armstrong beat Jimmy Garvin in a death match, Morton-Gibson beat Andersons in a tornado match (no heat but a very good match, after Morton pinned Ole, Arn and Ole had a mid-ring stare down), Jimmy Valiant beat Ivan Koloff via DQ (all clowning and stalling, Vladimir interfered but missed Valiant with the chair), Manny Fernandez-Rick Rude (who aren't getting over like World tag champs should) beat Dick Murdoch-Baron Von Raschke in a terrible match, Tully Blanchard went to a 25:00 draw with Barry Windham (real exciting match but little heat till post-match brawl), Road Warriors & Dusty kept the 6-man belts beating Midnight & Bubba (the babyfaces all sold well for Bubba, who has added some nice moves including dropkicks and the enzuigiri) when Dusty pinned Eaton and in a no DQ match, Flair pinned Nikita after an excellent 20:00 with no rest holds. Flair will be winning the no DQ matches everywhere (using ropes of course) to set up Barry Windham as the new top contender. . . 1/16 in Hollywood, Fla. drew 4,000 (tickets were \$15 and \$18 so gate was still quite good) as Tim Horner pinned Ricky Lee Gibson (pretty good), Denny Brown drew Hector Guerrero (real good), Valiant pinned Whatley in 4:00 (awful), Morton-Gibson beat Ivan Koloff-Dingo Pietrov via DQ in the worst match on the card in 9:00 with most of the fans rooting for the Russians, Armstrong beat Jimmy Garvin

in a death match (***), Windham (who got the best reception on the card) beat Arn Anderson in the best match on the card (***), Nikita pinned Tully in 18:00 of mostly rest holds with a clothesline that missed by a mile--but Tully sold it like he'd been shot, the typical first-run Flair beats Dusty via DQ with false pin finish (good work rate here--both guys got super responses from fans) and Roadies beat Midnight in a poor scaffold match. I was told the scaffold was cut to 14 feet, the match only went 3½ minutes and fans were chanting "boring" because for some reason, Roadies aren't over here. . . 1/17 in Greensboro drew 9,000 as Guerrero beat Brown in a non-title match (**), Arn pinned Horner (pretty good), Armstrong beat Garvin via DQ (fair), Russians beat Murdoch-Von Raschke (total dud), Windham drew Blanchard over 25:00 (only one rest hold, four star match, both bled, best Greensboro match in a long time), Morton-Gibson beat Rude-Fernandez via DQ (***), Road Warriors-Dusty beat Midnight-Bubba (***), and Nikita beat Flair via DQ in a subpar match. First 15:00 were bad, last 5:00 were good. . . They had an excellent TV brawl between Flair and Windham taped on 1/13 in Columbia, S.C. to set up their feud, which in the ring could be one of the hottest ones of 1987. They have bouts set against each other throughout February. . . 1/2 in Kansas City drew 1,000 with lower ticket prices as Bob Brown-Bill Dundee beat Rufus Jones-Sam Houston in a death match (Sam couldn't continue), Mod Squad won the tag belts from Dave Peterson-Todd Champion and Mod Squad also beat The Batten Twins. . . Porkchop Cash turned heel here against Rufus Jones. . . 1/9 drew just over 220 for Brown vs. Houston in a bullrope match. 1/31 in KC has Valiant vs. Arn Anderson, Battens vs. Midnight Express, Dundee defends Central states belt against Brad Armstrong and Murdoch vs. Big Bubba. . . This group apparently headed to Detroit with George Cannon as the front-man. Another interesting irony is that Cannon originally brought WWF to Detroit because he was paranoid that Ole Anderson's Georgia group would try and run his independent out of business. Under Titan, Detroit became one of the hottest wrestling cities in the country, but Cannon is from the old school and apparently couldn't cope with Titan's philosophy on what is wrestling.

New Japan: Little here other than results from 1/12 in Kiryu as Antonio Inoki-Seiji Sakaguchi beat Black Bart-Buzz Sawyer in 13:09, Akira Maeda-Osamu Kido downed Cuban Assassin (Dave Sierra)-Tony St. Clair, Yoshiaki Fujiwara pinned Umanosuke Ueda, Tatsumi Fujinami beat Konga the Barbarian via DQ, Keiji Muto pinned El Camek, Kantaro Hoshino & Shiro Koshinaka beat Rey Cobra & Black Cat, rookie Darryl Peterson (an American who was a top-ranked collegiate heavyweight at the University of Iowa under coach Dan Gable--about 6-5 and 350 pounds and was trained as a pro in Japan) pinned Masahiro Chono in 2:56 while Mike Von Erich beat Shoku Kim in the opener. . . . The Japanese press hasn't been too kind to Mike who has been hidden in prelim bouts against 160-pounders with no experience either. . . Steve Williams & Rick Steiner will be here as a tag team on the next tour which begins 2/24. I was told that Williams has told Steiner that when they go to Japan, they wrestle "exactly like we did in college." I feel sorry for the Japanese if that's the case.

All Japan: On 1/12 in Kitakyushu saw Riki Choshu-Yoshiaki Yatsu-Isamu Teranishi beat Haru Sonoda-Jumbo Tsuruta-Genichiro Tenryu, Takashi Ishikawa-Hiroshi Wajima-Giant Baba DCOR Tiger Jeet Singh-Frank Lancaster-Nelson Royal, Curt Hennig pinned Mighty Inoue, Tiger Mask-Masa Fuchi DCOR Ashura Hara-Hiro Saito and prelims.

And more from Japan: Gong Magazine's 10 biggest stories of the year in Japan: 1) Hiroshi Wajima, multi-name Grand champion in sumo wrestling joins the pro ranks; 2) The UWF wrestlers join with New Japan Pro Wrestling; 3) Yoshiaki Yatsu, pro wrestler, wins the Japanese national freestyle championship at 286 pounds; 4) The Inoki-Spinks and Maeda-Neilsen card in Tokyo; 5) Inoki & Fujiwara win the Japan Cup tag team tournament; 6) Bruiser Brody returns to Japan to wrestle Inoki to a 60 minute draw before a \$465,000 gate; 7) Inoki's TV show is moved from its long-time Friday night slot to Monday night; 8) Riki Choshu wins both the PWF title and International tag team title (with Yatsu); 9) Andre the Giant ends his career in Japan by losing to Inoki and getting into a controversial non-cooperation match with Maeda; 10) Sumo star and former freestyle World superheavyweight champion John Tenta signs with Baba. . . Several Japanese magazines printed this letter, hand-written by Bruiser Brody while in Hawaii and part of publicity for him to try and return to Japan. "To Maeda: Big mouth, but small heart. To be top champion, you must win fight in ring, not in newspaper. You can never be top man until you fight and beat top wrestling stars. So far, you have not done this. For you, Maeda, I offer special invitation. You name the place and produce the money, and Bruiser Brody will beat you for sure. I'm waiting for you." It's written in broken English because that's the style of English they speak in Japan (the few who do speak English, that is). It took me about 10 days to speak normal English after the trip I took there several years ago.

CWA: The 1/11 show in Memphis drew 6,500 as Jerry Lawler had two singles main events. In the first, Lawler was disqualified against Tommy Rich for throwing fire. Then Lawler faced Austin Idol, and Lawler won this match via DQ when Rich came back and he and Idol double-teamed Lawler including straddling him on the top turnbuckle. Lawler was carried out on a stretcher and is now said to be injured while he apparently takes a few weeks vacation. There are rumors going around that Lawler may appear on some AWA shows, which seems possible since Nick Bockwinkel and Jerry Blackwell have appeared here in recent weeks. . . With the Fabs having started in the area on 1/17, crowds are naturally going to be up. As of right now, Fabs are only in for a brief stay but they are negotiating to bring them in full-time. Ditto the Shepherders. . . Since they don't need Lawler to draw, they

can do the injury angle as history shows, whenever Lawler leaves for a month or so, then returns, that they usually get several sellouts out of it. The problem is, normally, when Lawler leaves, the crowds while he's gone are terrible, but not this case I presume. Also on 1/11, Jerry Blackwell actually wrestled twice, beating both Goliath and Big Bubba to win the tournament to crown a World superheavyweight champion. Apparently the original plan when they booked Blackwell was for him to challenge Giant Hillbilly Elmer for the title on 1/11, but apparently Frazier was involved in an auto accident several weeks ago and isn't back wrestling. Also Jeff Jarrett & Billy Travis beat the Rock'n'Roll RPM's to win the Southern tag team title (RPMs are headed to Dallas), S.T. Jones pinned Boy Tony to keep the Int. title thanks to help from Tracy Smothers, who was wearing a dress and serving as Tony's valet for a day, Downtown Bruno pinned Emily Arthur, the fan from the stands when Big Bubba attacked her, and Paul Diamond & Pat Tanaka beat John Boyd & Tony Burton. . . The Fabs debuted on 1/17 in Nashville going to a DDQ with The Shepherders (Luke Williams & Butch Miller) in a good brawl before a near sellout of 2,700 which drew \$20,000. Also: Jarrett-Travis beat RPMs, Jones pinned Tony, Bruno pinned Emily Arthur, The Daughters of Darkness (Luna Vachon & Lock) beat Debbie Combs & Candi Hall (originally to be Candi Divine, however they brought in this new girl who apparently was in her first match), Bubba pinned Tanaka and Goliath drew Diamond. . . There are an awful lot of folks telling me that the promotion is trying hard to downplay Tanaka and Diamond, for fear they'll surpass Jarrett as the area's pretty boy babyface. Most everyone tells me that Tanaka has the best matches and gets just about the best heat of anyone on the circuit, yet he's stuck in the opening matches each week. Tanaka is rather small, but size has never been as much a factor here as anywhere else and Jarrett weighs less than 200: Goto has returned, Sato is coming.

World Class: To correct what I wrote a few pages ago, apparently in the last few days The Fantastics and the RPMs have agreed to come in full-time. The 2/2 show at Tarrant County, besides Kerry vs. Adias will have Kevin defending the World title against Al Madril, The RPMs defend the Southern tag team title (which they've actually already lost, but truth has never been one of this group's best attributes) against Fantastics, Tony Atlas vs. Abdullah the Butcher (I have a feeling Atlas will be replaced in this match by Red River Jack, who debuts here within a week or so) and get this one--Gary Hart vs. David Manning. On 1/5 after a match with Abby and Atlas, Hart attacked Manning and really beat him up. Then on 1/12 while Hart was doing an interview, Manning came out, ripped up his referee's license, and attacked Hart. . . The Friday night crowds in Dallas have increased from an average of 250 per week to nearly 700 per week with no real explanation other than Kerry getting more involved from his position as manager. . . Kerry, by the way, will be wrestling Adias with a cast on. . . The talk of Lance Von Erich leaving is still pretty strong. It's no longer a question of where he'll go, but instead a question of what his next job will be since he seems to feel his future is in modeling. The Japan match changed his attitude about wrestling as he realized he doesn't have enough skill to go somewhere where he can make good money, and apparently doesn't want to learn either. . . On 1/12 in Fort Worth they held a tournament for the Texas State title which Buzz Sawyer held until quitting in November. Bob Bradley won the tournament pinning Dingo Warrior in the finals.

Deep South Wrestling: This promotion runs shows in most cities in Georgia besides Atlanta and does TV tapings in Carrollton, Ga. Some of you, who watch Pro Wrestling This Week, have seen clips from here. . . 1/18 in Marietta, GA drew a half-house (have heard that's anywhere from 800 to 1,400) as Jerry Oates turned heel and beat Ranger Ross via count out, Grizzly Boone (who is one of the worst I've ever seen) double count out Rick Link (who wears make-up like Road Warrior Hawk), The Masked Nightmares (not Ken Wayne & Danny Davis) won the Deep South tag title from Scott & Steve Armstrong when the Nightmares manager, Mystic, hit Scott with a cane, Don Sanders pinned Mike Golden after Mike scored the original pin using the ropes and Tommy Rich finked to the referee, then The Assassin & The Flame (Jody Hamilton & Roger "Dirty Rhodes" Smith) beat Rich & Boone (sub for Jerry Blackwell who was there, but had a cast on his foot and couldn't wrestle) when Golden hit Rich with Brass Knux and the main event was a double DQ in a lumberjack match between Randy Rose (best wrestler on the circuit) and Mr. Wrestling II. Hamilton switches his identity between Flame and Assassin here regularly depending on which masked

man gets suspended, so teaming Assassin & Flame was supposed to be impossible in the fans' eyes. Smith had been wrestling here without a mask as Dirty Rhodes, and all the fans knew he was Hamilton's tag partner in the match.

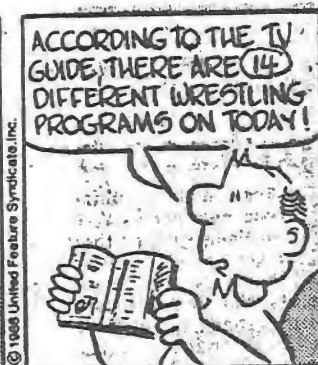
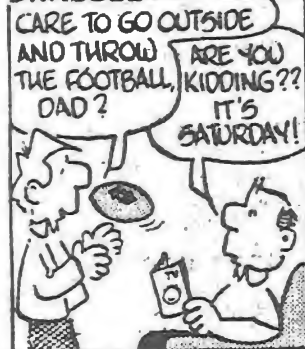
Florida: Badnews Allen won the Florida title on 1/13 in Tampa from Ron Simmons. I do know Lex Luger did a job for Kevin Sullivan in a lumberjack match, which was the main event. Luger will be losing to Sullivan in several cage matches as well before heading to Crockett country. Don't you love how Crockett welcomes Luger and Windham "to the NWA" when they join their promotion. . . Others, besides those mentioned last week that are being talked of as coming to Florida include Ricky Johnson, Tommy Rogers (that's evidently off) and Steve Armstrong.

AWA: Only thing I've heard out of this area is that Verne is indeed running a show on 1/22 at the Met Center. Since it costs five figures just to rent the building, unless crowds are better than the pre-holiday days (800 to 1,500) they're going to barely make enough to cover rent, let alone pay talent and security. Headlining will be Col. DeBeers vs. Jimmy Snuka in a Diamond Miners Glove match (basic glove on the pole match), Greg Gagne & Nick Bockwinkel vs. Larry Zbyszko & Mr. Saito and a tag team title match sending Buddy Rose & Doug Somers vs. Midnight Rockers. Has anybody seen the Russian tag team that was here? Also in the Twin Cities, Titan is in 2/8 with Hogan vs. Hernandez and Steamboat vs. Savage, while Crockett is in 2/26 with Flair vs. Windham, Fernandez-Rude vs. Rock'n'Roll, Nikita vs. Tully, Bubba vs. Ron Garvin and Andersons-Luger vs. Wahoo-Murdoch-Von Raschke.

Alabama: Len Denton (The Grappler in World Class) will be coming in to re-form his tag team with Tony Anthony as the Dirty White Boys and feud with the Nightmares. . . Buddy Landel is scheduled to start within a week or two. . . Veteran Dennis Hall made a few prelim dates as a jobber. . . 1/12 in Birmingham drew 2,500 as Rip Rogers DDQ Adrian Street, Larry Hamilton pinned U.S. jr. champ Tom Prichard in a non-title match in 4:01. The three New Guinea Head Hunters beat Robert Fuller & Tennessee Stud (Ron Fuller) & Jimmy Golden via DQ in 3:13 (not a bad brawl, but far too short for a main event), The Nightmares beat Luke Williams & Butch Miller via DQ (best match on the card, lots of blood), Kevin Sullivan won via forfeit over The Bullet, who was a no-show (said to be injured, will return this week with a cast as a weapon on his hands), and Wendell Cooley pinned Chris Von Colt. . . Titan was in 1/10 in Birmingham and 1/11 in Huntsville with Stampedes, both won by Nikolai Volkoff and Piper over Adonis.

Other notes: About six UWF wrestlers will appear on two or three shows in the West Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia area in the next few weeks. Not sure of dates but one show is in Clarksburg, W. Va. . . Sgt. Slaughter appeared on Joe Franklin's TV show and challenged Hulk Hogan to a match. I'm not going to hold my breath. . . Speaking of Hogan, he and the Road Warriors will be at the NATPE convention where the various producers and syndicators try and sell their shows. It's similar to the Los Angeles convention of last week, but about ten times as large. . . Skin magazine "Hot Talk," which is supposedly the sister publication of "Penthouse" will be running a "Confessions of a Ring Rat," story, in a future issue. Got a rough draft of the piece and there are some pretty vivid descriptions of various Crockett wrestlers (late 1984, early 1985 time frame). No names given, but it was pretty easy to figure out who was who. Better hide this one from the wives, it's pretty descriptive. . . Electronic Media magazine had an article on GLOW. They quoted David B. McLane (the guy who set up the troupe) as saying, "McLane theorized that any woman of moderate coordination and athletic ability could be taught the rudiments of wrestling in a relatively short period. As it turned out, it takes less than two weeks." Speaking of GLOW, they've run live shows already in Mobile, Ala. and Miami, Fla. They told me at that same convention that they drew about 1,500 in Mobile and 2,000 in Miami, and judging from the amount of b.s. there, I'd estimate dividing those numbers by about three before getting an accurate crowd figure. . . I suspect both the UWF and WWF will be trying to run shows at Reunion Arena in Dallas before long. If Wrestlemania draws in March, they're got a date at Reunion in May.

DRABBLE



FLASH UPDATE: From the 1/26 Tamps Titan tapings: Bret Hart & Jim Neidhart captured the tag title from the Bulldogs (Dynamite was there in the corner) with some sort of illegal help from ref Danny Davis. As the taping progresses (now in the second hour). Jack Tunney fires Davis as a referee, and later Davis is brought back, as a wrestler, now managed by Jimmy Hart. Andre also showed up, with Heenan as his adviser, challenging Hogan to a title match. Andre ripped up Hulk's T-shirt and violence occurred with Hulk bleeding, and later in the taping, Hogan accepts the challenge. . . Expect more cooperation between the Alabama and Florida offices as the weeks go by. . . Midnight Rockers captured AWA tag title from Rose & Somers on 1/27 in Bloomington, MN. . . Miguel Perez Jr. beat Bob Heffernan for the WWC North American title on 1/21 in Cantano, Puerto Rico. . . Details in the next issue.

THE
MONDAY

25
19

MOST INTRIGUING PERSONS of 1986

(in no particular order)

1



HUCK
UNWHOLESOME

'THE HUCKSTER'

HULK HOGAN, WHILE THIS BLEACHED, BLOATED BLOWHARD ACHIEVED NEW HEIGHTS OF GATE SUCCESS AND IN-RING MEDIOCRITY, HIS WIRED WEARINESS WORKED WONDERS ON THE NEWLY ANNOIED.

HE'S A TV NATURAL, AS HIS 24 INCH (DIAGONAL MEASURE?) PYTHONS AND I.Q. TO MATCH ^{WILL} TAKE PRO 'RASSLIN FROM MEDIA DARLING TO YESTERDAYS FAD QUICKER THAN YOU CAN SAY HULA-HOOP.

2



'BAM BAM'
BIGELOW

HOW CAN YOU NOT LOVE A GUY THAT TATOOS HIS HEAD? HIS ASTONISHING AGILITY FOR ONE SO LARGE WOULD SEEM TO ASSURE HIS PUSH TO THE TOP. BUT AS WRESTLING CONSTRICTS TO THE 'BIG 3', THIS SENSATIONAL SOCIOPATH MAY GET BEAT DOWN BY THE POLITICS OF THE GAME HIS STINT FOR FRITZ VON ERICH SHOWCASED THE MOST GLARING EXAMPLE OF A PROMOTION TOTALLY WASTING/MISUSING/GENERALLY BLOWING A UNIQUE SPECIMEN. SAID TO BE A LADIES MAN (DURING THE EVENING)

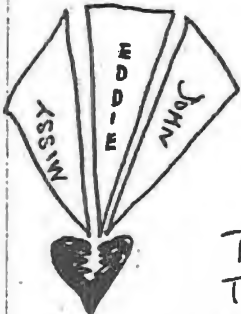
3



YURI
(SPELLED
YUIR ON
THE CURYON)
GORDIENKO
DEMARCO

WHAT POSSESSES LONG-RETIRED, 50+ FORMER NAME PAUL DEMARCO TO COME BACK? DOING A RUSSIAN XENO ACT FOR AN AWA THAT RESEMBLES SIBERIA? NO QUESTION WHO ~~BADA~~ CAME UP WITH THE RECYCLED MONIKER-- BUT THIS ATTEMPT AT A MARKETING 'NICHE' IS NO LAUGHING MATTER. WHY ~~IS~~ THIS MAN ALWAYS SMILING?

4



JOHN TATUM - MISSY HYATT - EDDIE GILBERT

WHEN! LIFE IMITATES ART? ART IMITATES LIFE? WRESTLING IMITATES BOTH? WHATEVER THE CASE, THIS TRIANGLE-ANGLE WENT BEYOND VERISIMILITUDE TO THE POINT THE PROMOTION ^{BECAME AFRAID TO} PUSH IT.

THERE WAS AN UNDERLYING INTENSITY TO THE EMOTIONS IN THIS FEUD, MAKING IT ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING ANGLES IN THIS OR ANY YEAR!

5



"DUMP" MATSUMOTO... WHAT ALL HER BOYFRIENDS DO... WHERE YOU THROW GARBAGE IN MATSUMOTO...

MOST LEGIT-ACTING WOMAN BADASS IN THE HISTORY OF THE BIZ... "DUH", AS HER FRIENDS CALL HER, BRAWLS AND ABUSES WITH A RELENTLESS GLEE. HAS THE VISUAL IMPACT OF A ROAD WARRIOR ON LSD... GETS TO BEAT UP ON THE BEST LOOKING COLLECTION OF WRESTLERS IN THE GAME (THE 'LOW' DOES NOT WITHSTANDING). EVERY JAPANESE SUBMISSIVE MALE'S IDEAL FANTASY; DUMPER IS PERVERSLY FASCINATING.

'TOP TWENTY - FIVE' CONT

⑥ KEN MANTELL

BOOKER KEN MANTELL WAS A KEY FIGURE IN THE BILL WATTS - FRITZ VON ERICH BLOODFUE. HE BROUGHT HIMSELF AND HALF OF WORLDCASSAS TALENT POOL IN, AND THEN INGENUOUSLY KEPT SOME STAVE ACTS STAVE. SEEMS IT IS KEN'S INSPIRATION TO BRING IN A SLIMMED DOWN BUT STILL SOPORIFIC SUNSHINE, WHEN HAVING AND MISUSING A MUCH MORE MARKETABLE MISSY HYATT. SURE KEN'S BEEN GOOD THIS YEAR, WITH THE HARDEST WORKING BUT THIRD BEST KNOWN POOL OF TALENT. SOMEHOW HE DOESN'T EXACTLY INSPIRE CONFIDENCE THOUGH; BILL WATTS IS SMART TO BE KEEPING A CLOSE REIGN ON THINGS.

⑦ AKIRA MAEDA

TOTALLY PSYCHOTIC INDIVIDUAL, AS HE SEEMS TO WANT TO WRESTLE LIKE IT'S REAL. MAEDA'S DONE SOME INTERESTING THINGS THIS YEAR. HE'S MAINTAINED HIS STRONG STYLE; CONVINCED THE PUBLIC HE'S LEGIT, UPSET THE POWER EQUATION IN JAPAN BY CONVINCING KEY FORCES HE'S THE SUCCESSOR TO ANTONIO EBONOKI. FOR A GUY WHO "HATES THE BUSINESS", HE'S POISED TO BE A KEY PLAYER.

⑧ BUDDY LANDELL

THE GUY'S CONSISTENT, I'LL SAY THAT. STARTED THE YEAR WITH A BANG BY GETTING FIRED FROM CROCKETT ON THE VERGE OF GETTING A MAJOR PUSH...

CAUGHT ON FOR SEVERAL MONTHS IN MEMPHIS, KEEPING HIS BEHAVIOR WITHIN THE HIGH STANDARDS OF THE AREA... WORKING WITH BILL DUNDEE, CROCKETT DECIDED TO GIVE

THIS POTENTIAL MAJOR TAVEN; ANOTHER TRY. ADAPTED TO THE FASTER LIFE STYLE ALL TOO QUICKLY AND WAS UNPREPARED FOR THE REWARDS OF BEING MADE LEAD HEAD OF THE CENTRAL STATES FLY OVER CIRCUIT... ONE LOOK AT COSMOPOLITAN TOPEKA AND LANDELL SPLIT FOR ANOTHER CRACK AT BILL WATTS, WHERE HE LASTED ABOUT ONE WEEK.

BUT THE PUD HAS BURNED MORE BRIDGES THAN A WWII RUSSIAN ARMY. HIS FUTURE IN THIS BUSINESS IS QUESTIONABLE. MAY RETURN TO COLLEGE TO GET HIS PHARMACY DEGREE. LANDELL'S PRESENTLY ON AN EXTENDED "ATTITUDINAL ADJUSTMENT TOUR", HIS SECOND OF THE YEAR, DESTINATION UNKNOWN, AND HIS NEXT MOVE IS ANYONE'S GUESS. HE SEEMS TO HAVE ROCKS IN HIS HEAD (MANUALLY INSERTED).

⑨ KEVIN - KERRY - LANCE - MIKE - FRITZ - CHRIS - GHOST OF DAVID VON ERICH

ENOUGH VON ERICH'S FOR A COLLECTIVE 3 DIGIT I.Q., WE'RE CONSIDERING THESE MULTIPLE MANIFESTATIONS AS SOME SORT OF SINGLE MANY HEADED SNAKE.

THEY'VE CORNERED THE MARKET ON SENSELESS TRAGEDY AND HAVE SEEN THE HOTTEST PROMOTION OF 3 YEARS AGO ALMOST WIPED OUT. BUT WITH SENSELESS PERSONAL INDISCRETION, REAL AND BOGUS MEMBERS BEING PUSHED OVER WHILE BEING BEYOND TERRIBLE, THE MOST INSULTING AND OUTRAGEOUS FIBS FOISTED ON THEIR FANS, AND THEIR MAINTAINING AN UNWARRANTED AROGANCE, IT'S TOUGH TO FEEL BAD FOR 'EM. GOOD TASTE AND COMMON SENSE ARE ALL ON THE FRITZ.

10



"BAM BAM"

TERRY "BAM BAM" GORDY, THE HIGHEST FLYING FREEBIRD, THIS DANGEROUS DELINQUENT MADE GREAT STRIDES AS A SINGLE PERFORMER THIS YEAR, EVEN THOUGH HE RETAINED AFFILIATION WITH THE MICHAEL HAYES ABUSE SOCIETY... WHAT'S MOST IMPRESSIVE ABOUT THE WILD CHILD ~~184443~~ WINNING THE FIRST UWF TITLE, ~~AND~~ BEING A SIGNIFICANT STAR IN JAPAN, AND WINNING GROWING RESPECT AMONG HIS PEERS IS IT'S ALL DONE USING HIS NATURAL PHYSICAL GIFTS. DOES HE EVERY GYM TRAIN?

WHO WOULD HAVE THE TIME WHEN THERE'S SERIOUS PARTYING TO DO? HIS ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ABILITY ARE INCREDIBLE FOR A GUY ONLY 25 YEARS OLD. A WONDERFUL 'UKKED UP OERGROWN RED NECK BULLY BOY. A HARD WORKER, SURPRISING STAMINA AND REALISTIC BRAWLER. GOTTA LOVE 'IM!

11



THE 'NATURAL BOY' RIC FLAIR, SIMPLY THE BEST IN THE BIZ... 1986 WAS REALLY A NOTHING SPECIAL YEAR FOR THE GUY, LOADS OF WALTZES WITH THAT WITHERING WHAVE DUSTY RHODES, BUT FLAIR PARTICIPATES WITH GLEE IN THE BIZARRO FINISHES... STOOD CENTER STAGE FOR THE BASH SERIES AND STARCADE, AT LEAST MEETING A WIDER VARIETY OF FOES. MOST INCREDIBLE PACKAGE OF IMAGE AND ABILITY ~~MAYBE~~ EVER, FLAIR STILL APPEARS TO THRIVE IN THE WIRRELWIND AND RETAINS THE ROLE LONG AFTER THE BOUT HAS ENDED. WOULDN'T YOU KNOW HE'S JUST A LOCAL BOY, ON HIS SECOND MARRIAGE, KIDS, HOME, PROBABLY A DOG... HARD TO IMAGINE WHY, NO REASON RIC SHOULDN'T BE CHAMP 10 MORE YEARS ~~AND~~ OR SO (EXCEPT FOR THE OCCASIONAL AND NECESSARY QUICKIES), 'CAUSE WHO COULD POSSIBLY DO IT ANY BETTER?!

12



BROOOOOOOZER BWUDEEEEB..... AS HIS LYICAL ENTRO IN JAPAN GOES, THE WINNER OF THE ALL TIME MONDO FAVE AWARD, OUR FAVORITE MANIAC DID A HELL OF A LOT MORE OUTSIDE THE RING THAN IN THIS YEAR. SEEMS TO LOVE IT EITHER FEAST OR FAMINE, BB STARTED THE YEAR WALKING OUT ON INOKI'S PROMOTION AND TENS OF THOUSANDS OF \$\$\$, IMMEDIATELY CLOSED A DEAL WITH FRED BARONS TEXAS ALL SCARS FOR PROBABLY A HUNDRED A NIGHT. REMEMBERING THOSE 5K AWA PAYDAYS, BB GOT 'BUD JERRY BLACKWELL TO FINALLY GET THE GAGNE'S CONVINCED TO LET HIM BACK. IT LASTED TWO

MONTHS, CULMINATING IN VERNIE'S 'RASSLE ROCK PROMO, AND BB WAS A KEY PLAYER IN DRAWING THE AMAZING 20000 THROB OF MONDO MARKS. GOT STIFFED ON THE PAYOFF (EXPECTED FIVE, MAYBE GOT TWO), SO HEADED BACK TO TEXAS, ALREADY APPEARING FOR FRITZ ASKISSON'S WORLD CLASS. BB, SLOWING, GREYING, WORN BY THE BIZ, STILL GOT THE MOST CONCEIVABLE OUT OF A FUED WITH FELLOW GHOUL ABDULLAH THE BUTCHERED. MET BOB BROWN IN WINNIPEG FOR DYNAMO PROMOTOR TONY CONDELLO WHICH DREW DOZENS... A SHOW HERE, A SLICE THERE, BRODY HAD AMPLE TIME FOR INTROSPECTION. PLANS WERE IN THE WORKS FOR BB TO RETURN TO INOKI'S GROUP BY LATE SUMMER, COLLECTING HIS UNPAID THOUSANDS, ACTUALLY APPEARED A COUPLE TIMES, DRAWING A HUGE GATE AGAINST INOKI THE JOKI. ALL SET TO DO THE DECEMBER TAG TOURNAMENT (W/ SNUKA), ILL WINDS FROM THE WEST FORTOLD TROUBLE AND BRODY WALKED OUT AGAIN, HIS WEEKLY TAKE OVER TWENTY GRAND, WHEN ENOUGH FINANCIAL ASSURANCES WERE LACKING. BB'S BACK TO SQUARE ZERO. EVEN THE MINOR PROMOTIONS HE OFTEN WORKS FOR IN THIS COUNTRY ARE DISAPPEARING

WHO KNOWS WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR THIS INTENSE ICONOCLAST, BUT WHATEVER IT IS, WE'LL BE IN THERE BARKING ALONGSIDE THIS ALL TIME GREAT!

3 STAN HANSEN

THIS LOVABLE LUNATIC HAD AN INTERESTING YEAR, STARTING IT RIGHT OFF WINNING THE AWA TITLE FROM RICK MARTEL. IT WAS A SEMI DESPARATE MOVE BY GAGNE INC, "A BETTER THAN THEY HAD A RIGHT TO EXPECT, AND ONLY AFTER A RELUCTANT STAN SUCCOMBED TO BABA'S STRONG URGING. TOO LITTLE TO LATE UNFORTUNATELY, AS THE AWA HAD ALREADY LOST ITS BASE AND INTENDED FEUDS WITH SGT. SLAUGHTER OR NICK BOCKWINKLE DIDN'T HELP MUCH. EVER SO SLIGHTLY PAST HIS PEAK, STAN IS STILL THE MOST 'OVER' AMERICAN WORKING IN JAPAN. LARGELY WRESTLES ONLY THERE. HE DOESN'T NEED TO PUT UP WITH ASSHOLES THAT RUN THIS BIZ.

OF COURSE HIS WALKING OUT ON THE AWA AND THE TITLE MADE BIG NEWS, AS IT WAS A FIRST FOR THE FORMER ESTEEMED TITLE. THE ERRATIC EXPLANATIONS THE PROMOTION HAD TO MAKE WERE AMUSING AND PATHETIC. HANSEN'S STILL A PREMIER BRAWLER AND BAD BOY, A FUN GUY.

14 BRITISH BULLDOGS

WHAT ON EARTH ARE TWO OF THE BEST WRESTLERS/WORKERS/ACROBATS IN THE BIZ DOING IN THE WWF? IS MAKING MORE MONEY AND DESTROYING THEIR BODIES WAY BEYOND THEIR FOND-EST HOPES. MORE INCREDIBLE IS THAT THEY'VE BEEN ONLY ECHOES OF THEIR RECENT SELVES, BUT THEY'RE 'OVER' ON THEIR ABILITY. THAT SAYS A LOT, BOTH GOOD AND BAD. ABOUT WHAT KIND OF PROMOTION THE WWF IS. DYNAMITE KID (TOMMY 'BRAIN DAMAGE' BILLINGTON) AND DAVEY BOY SMITH (DAVID SMITH'S HOLD-OVER NAME FROM A SKINNY SIX-TEEN YEAR OLD) DO THE BEST IN BAD CIRCUMSTANCES CONSIDERING

THEIR OPPONENTS AND THE PROMOTION'S WRESTLING STYLE. THIS STOLID STYLE, THE KILLER TRAVEL SKEED, THE DRIVE FOR THE 'LOOK' AND ALL THAT INVOLVES HAS SLOWED DOWN AND NEARLY WORE OUT THIS STILL IMPRESSIVE PAIR.

BIGGEST NEWS ALSO THE WORST-KIDS BRUTALIZED BACK TO ALL GAVE OUT AND SURGERY, TRACTION, PAIN, AND PSYCHOTIC PREMATURE RETURN ARE IN THE OFFING. THE EXACT WEAR FUTURE IS QUITE UNCERTAIN. WE'LL ALL HOPE FOR A QUICK RECOVERY, ~~AND~~ A WIDESPREAD INCREASE IN THE WWF WORKRATE, AND A RETURN OF THE SHAH TO IRAN, WHICH IS MORE LIKELY TO OCCUR.

15 NIKITA KOLOFF

QUITE AN IMPRESSIVE YEAR FOR THIS FELLOW WITH AN AWESOME PRESENCE AND MINIMAL ABILITY. PERHAPS THE BEST EYES AND OVERALL EVIL CONTENANCE GOING TODAY.

KOLOFF WAS ORIGINALLY BORN IN THE STEPPES OF MINNESOTA, AND TODAY STILL RESIDES IN A DALLA OUTSIDE GOLDEN VALLEY. HE MISSET THE 1994 OLYMPICS (HIS T.V. SET WAS BROKEN) AND WAS TRAINED PRO BY NOTED COMRADE EDDIE SHARKYVIT. HIS BALD HEAD, THICK BROW, JUICED UP PHYSIQUE AND TALENTED OPPONENT ALL GOT OVER THIS GUY WHO'S AT HIS BEST WHEN STANDING STILL.

THE IMAGE AND IMPACT WERE SO IMPRESSIVE THAT IT TRANSLATED INTO GREAT RESPECT BY THE FANS. RESULT - ACHIEVING HEEL POPULARITY LIKE THE EARLY ROAD WARRIORS. IT WAS INEVITABLE HE WOULD EVENTUALLY TURN BABYFACE, BUT THE TRAGIC ACCIDENT TO MAXIMUM T.A. MADE IT IMMEDIATE. ALTHOUGH IT'S BEEN EFFECTIVE, IT UNFORTUNATELY HAD NO REAL ANGLE OR BUILD UP. THE BABYFACE ~~STAGE~~ IS A FRESH TWIST, BUT WE QUESTION ITS LONGEVITY. SURE TO BE BIG FOR SOME TIME TO COME, "NIKITA" IS A BAD EXAMPLE FOR ASPIRING HORMONE TRAINERS, 'CAUSE THEY MIGHT "MAKE IT" TOO.

(16) VERNE GAGNE

1980 SAW EFFECTIVELY THE LAST GASP OF THE AWA WHEN WRESTLEROCK 940 WAS A SUCCESS IN MOST WAYS. MORE RAPID DESCENT THAN DOWNHILLIDE, THEY NO LONGER CAN BOOK NATIONAL ESTABLISHED TALENT, AND SEE ITS TV AND ARENA ARRANGEMENTS CONTINUALLY ERODE. NICE WAY TO END THE YEAR '80 FINDING OUT HE CAN'T EVEN RUN IN THE ST. PAUL CIVIC CENTER.

STILL GAGNE TALKS DETERMINED AND IS CAPABLE OF PRESENTING A SCALED-DOWN REGIONAL PRODUCT, BUT IT APPEARS ^{THEY'RE} ~~THE~~ RELENTLESS ^{REALITY} ~~FORCES~~ FORCES THAT SEEM TO PLAQUE HIS EVERY MOVE. MIGHT HE EVER CONSIDER RETIRING (KNOW AS 'FOLDING THE CON' IN OLD DAYS) AND JUST BASK IN THE RESPECT AND AFFECTION HE HOLDS FROM HIS MANY WRESTLING FRIENDS.

SERVICES TO A STRUGGLING AND GRATEFUL WORLD CLASS PROMOTION. THE BREATH OF FRESH AIR HE PROVIDED WAS MORE LIKE A TEMPERATURE INVERSION SMOG ALERT. BUT HE SURE WAS HELPFUL IN THE NASTY LITTLE BUSINESS OF DEALING WITH THOSE SORDID, SEAMY ARENA MANAGERS, OF COURSE, TONY ATLAS, A BLEACHED GEORGE WELLS AND THOSE 'DORABLE WORLD CLASS RING CUTIES' WORKED THE SAME MAGIC WWF FANS WORLD WIDE HAVE ENJOYED FOR YEARS. NICE JOB GEORGE. IS YOUR NEXT ASSIGNMENT A VISIT HOME TO BROTHER SANDY'S BOSSES?

(17) VINCE McMAHON

ANOTHER HIGH PROFILE YEAR FOR THE EGO INFESTED FUNSTER, BUT SOMETIMES IT SEEMS PARTYS CAN GO ON TOO LONG. WE'RE JUST WAITING TO SEE WHAT EXTENT THIS SELF CONSUMED MARKETING WIZ-BY PROCLAMATION DUDE WILL GO TO PUT HIMSELF 'OVER' IN THE MEANWHILE, HIS WEEKLY POMPOUS PLAYACTING IS GREAT FUN SO LONG AS YOU DON'T WATCH THE STUFF GO ON BETWEEN THE COMMERCIALS. IS HE A GENIUS? IS IT EASY TO LOOK SMART COMPARED TO A BEVY OF CROMAGNON EX-JOCKS WHO THINK 'WRESTLING IS A SPORT' ISN'T THAT SILLY?

(18) GEORGE SCOTT

A SORT OF WRESTLING FILTH CORROBORATIST TURN FIFTH COLUMNIST, THIS LONG TIME OFTEN TALENTED BOOKER ~~ON~~ ^{THE} LENT IS VAST

(19) BILL WATTS

THERE AREN'T MANY PEOPLE IN THIS BUSINESS WHO ~~HAVE~~ ^{APPEAR} INTELLIGENT, ADAPTABLE, HAVE A COGENT PROMOTIONAL PHILOSOPHY, AND POSSESS A WARRANTED CONFIDENCE IN THEIR PRODUCT TO THAT THEY'LL MAKE THE COMMITMENT TO COMPETE FOR A SIGNIFICANT MARKET SHARE. HOW THE HIGH STANDARDS OF HIS PRESENTATION WILL SUFFER AS TRAVEL AND EXPOSURE INCREASE. REMAINS TO BE SEEN.

THEY ALMOST CULTIVATE SMART FANS, AND ARE BY FAR THE LEAST CONTEMPTABLE OF THEIR CONSUMERS. WHEN THE COWBOY IS AT WORK BOTH IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA AND BEHIND THE ~~SCENES~~ ^{SCENES}, HIS WWF IS AT ITS BEST. BEST OF LUCK TO SOMEONE WHO DESERVES IT. IF ANYONE.

A FEW OF THOSE CATAGORIES YOU FORGOT TO MENTION....

BEST REFEREE THERE REALLY SHOULD BE THIS CATAGORY IN A YEAR END SURVEY. THEY'RE REALLY IMPORTANT ELEMENTS IN THE ENTIRE SCHEME OF THE SCAM. SOME REFS ARE GOOD, SOME ARE GOOD BUT LOOK BAD, SOME ARE JUST BAD, AND MANY REALLY SHOULDN'T BE THERE. A GOOD REF CAN MAKE A FINISH GREAT (THIS IS SOUNDING LIKE A COFFEE COMMERCIAL), MOST REFS ARE YOUR STANDARD INCOMPETANTS, BUT FORTUNATELY I DIDN'T SEE TOO MANY REFS SO BAD THAT THEY REALLY BOTCHED THE END.

NO QUESTION TOMMY YOUNG IS THE BEST AROUND. HE'S EVEN MORE FUN WHEN SEEN LIVE, 'CAUSE HE EMPLOYS SUBTLE SELF CONSCIOUS HUMOR AND INTERACTS WITH THE RINGSIDE ROWDYS. THAT ASIDE THOUGH, HE'S THE HARDEST WORKER REF, AND PUTS THE ENTIRE WWF TO SHAME, ^{FOR WORK} OBVIOUSLY DUSTY KNOWS THIS, AS ~~FOR~~ THE NEAR TRADEMARKED "TOMMY YOUNG REF BUMP FINISH!" FIGURES IN TOO MANY OF THEIR FINISHES. IT SUFFERS FROM TV OVER-EXPOSURE LIKE ANYTHING ELSE, AND MOST MARKS MUST BE GETTING SICK OF THIS CLUMSY, FRAIL FOOL. HONORABLE MENTION GOES TO THE VINCE MCMAHON LOOK-A-LIKE, DANNY DAVIS. NO WONDER VINCE LOVES HIM. THIS ONGOING ANGLE BUILD UP THE WWF IS DOING IS GREAT FUN. AND HE'S OBVIOUSLY COMPETENT ENOUGH TO RELY ON FOR THEIR SCREW JOB ENDINGS.

MOST WASTED AMERICAN (TALENT) IN AMERICA:

DICK MURDOCH, CHAVO GUERREO

MOST WASTED JAPANESE (TALENT) IN AMERICA:

M. SAITO LIFETIME AWARD; SHUNJI TAKANO

MOST WASTED (STATE OF CONSCIOUSNESS) AMERICAN IN AMERICA:

GEE, I CAN'T THINK OF ANYONE WHO'S NOT SOME SORT OF WELL TRAVELED NATURE BOY KNOCKOFF OR A SECOND GENERATION SPECIMEN OF A CERTAIN ONCE WRESTLING NAZI TURNED PRETEND PREACHER WHO'S PROMOTION MUST OPERATE ON FAITH, CUZ THERE SURE AIN'T NO TALENT.

HAVE FUREHEADS LIKE NEOCORTEX ~~CON~~ CONVOLUTIONS:

ABDULLAH THE BUTCHER, DUSTY RHODES, CURTIS JAEKEA, MANNY FERNANDEZ, OR ANYONE ELSE WHO WORKS FOR DUSTY RHODES...

WWF'S MOST ABUSIVE WASTES OF TALENT

SLATER (TOTAL), REED (THEY'LL TRY TO PUSH HIM AT LEAST), BRET HART, JESSE BARR, BOB ORTON, HARVEY RACE...

NEGATIVE CHARISMA AWARD

DOUG SOMERS, 'RIP' ROGERS, BARBARIAN NORD (NOT AS BAD, CLOSE TO ZERO), HONLEYTONKMAN FERRIS

BEST CARTOON-CHARACTER 'COM WRESTLER CREATED OUT OF WHOLE CLOTH BY THE WWF (WHACKY WRESTLN' FED.)

BRUTUS BEEFCAKE... HILLBILLY JIM... JIMMY JACK FUNK
OUTBACK JACK...

WRESTLING OBSERVER LETTER OF THE YEAR

7-28-86 "DOESN'T LIKE THE IDEA OF 'SELLING'": KEIN ONYSCHUK, OAK LAWN, IL
ACTS THAT CRACK ME UP, FOR NO PARTICULAR REASON:

SIMMY GARVIN, EDDIE GILBERT.

O.F. 1986

"ADORABLE" ADRIAN ADONIS

Real name: Keith Franke
 Size: 6-1, 325
 Birthday: September 15, 1953
 Years Pro: 12

The former street bully with the black leather outfit became pro wrestling's leading gay act of 1986. . . Adonis, at one time respected as one of the five best workers in the profession, having amazing quickness and agility for one so bulky, saw his weight balloon at an even faster rate than his work declined this past year. . . Adonis spent the summer as the leading heel in the WWF, hosting the "Flower Shop" segment on the syndicated shows. In reality, Adonis' drawing power never quite matched his "push." . . . Was involved in the turn of Roddy Piper to babyface, then fired by Titan with all kinds of reasons being mentioned from his weight problem to general unreliability to holding out for more money. . . After two months on the sidelines, with no offers coming from other promotions, and Titan dismayed by the poor crowds Piper was drawing against Don Muraco and Bob Orton, Adonis was quickly retrieved, although about 20 pounds heavier than when he left. . . As 1987 starts, they've been trying to roughen up the edges of his gay character in order to make him a more believable heel. . . Many will remember this year's version of Adonis as being the most tasteless act of a generally tasteless year in promoting wrestling.

"BRUISER" BRODY

Real name: Frank Goodish
 Size: 6-5, 270
 Birthday: June 14, 1946
 Years Pro: 14

1986 will not be remembered as the greatest year in the career of pro wrestling's best brawler of all-time. . . Brody spent most of the year working for dying promotions like World Class and the AWA and for smaller independents, against generally poor foes. . . The decline in the quality of his matches, often-times due to his poor opponents, was painfully obvious to his large legion of supporters. . . Brody's biggest headlines were in his on-again off-again status in Japan, where he has long been considered the No. 1 foreign wrestler. . . Brody finished 1985 on the outs with the Japanese, having walked out the afternoon of the championship match of the annual tag team tournament which he was involved in. He left Japan without getting paid for a lucrative tour. . . In August, while working a card in Honolulu that was being taped for Japanese television, negotiations were re-opened between Brody and New Japan Pro Wrestling, which

led to the most lucrative contract probably in the history of this business. While the dollar amount was never publicly revealed, it was rumored to be nearly double his previous \$14,000 weekly deal in Japan. . . This megabucks deal lasted all of one week, with the political climate in Japan causing Brody to demand his payment for the 1986 tag team tournament in advance. New Japan reluctantly agreed, then didn't come up with the money, and publicly stated Brody wouldn't appear because he was afraid to wrestle Andre the Giant, although several magazines did reveal the true story. . . There still is talk of Brody returning to Japan, probably for one final match in 1987. . . In the U.S., Brody set another record of sorts, lasting the entire year working on-and-off for World Class Wrestling without so much as one blow-up. . . He also worked for the now-defunct Texas All-Star Wrestling group, worked several dates for the now-defunct old Central States promotion, and came back to the AWA for a few shots before leaving after a reported \$2,000 payoff for working the main event at Wrestlerock--which drew a \$300,000 house. . . As the year ended, it appeared Brody's status as one of the top stars in wrestling was in jeopardy because of lack of exposure with the few remaining major groups and lack of foes good enough to bring out the best in him. . . Brody mainly worked blood matches with the likes of One Man Gang and Abdullah the Butcher in 1986.

RIKI CHOSHU

Real name: Mitsuo Yoshida
 Size: 5-10, 235
 Birthday: December 3, 1951
 Years Pro: 13

1986 is the year Riki Choshu solidified his status as the most popular wrestler in Japan. . . Although his popularity peaked in late 1984, Choshu still remained the key main eventer for Giant Baba's All Japan Pro Wrestling promotion and captured two major titles. . . In April he defeated Stan Hansen via disqualification to win the PWF championship. . . He had earlier, on February 5, teamed with Yoshiaki Yatsu to defeat Jumbo Tsuruta and Genichiro Tenryu to win the International tag team belts. . . While Choshu's feud with Stan Hansen was a disappointment both at the gate and moreso in the ring, he still was involved in as consistently good matches as any wrestler in the world. . . The long-haired former Olympic wrestler, originally from South Korea, is a key player as the wrestling war spreads to Japan with the Titan invasion in 1987. . . It's well known that Titan is hot after Choshu as the needed native star to make a go of it in Japan. . . Choshu's loss would be a major one,

however, for All Japan. This puts Choshu in an excellent business position. In addition, TV Asahi, which broadcasts New Japan wrestling, made overtures this past year about getting Choshu back in the New Japan fold, where he was from the start of his career late in 1974 through late 1984 when he left for Baba's group.

JIM CORNETTE

Real name: James Cornette
Size: 6-0, 220
Birthday:
Years Pro: 5

For the second year in a row Jim Cornette won the manager of the year honors in a runaway, to the surprise of almost nobody. The Louisville, Kentucky native who managed The Midnight Express and rookie Big Bubba Rogers is best known for his often brilliant interviews and hyper-active manner. Besides being the heat behind the success of the Express, two technically sound but lacking in charisma workers, Dennis Condrey and Bobby Eaton, Cornette himself made headlines in the ring. His series with Baby Doll in six man tag team action during July and August was one of the hottest issues during the Great American Bash tour. At the same time, his fall off the scaffold at Starcade '86, which resulted in legitimate knee surgery and knee damage which could result in a major operation in 1987, was one of the more unfortunate, yet memorable occurrences of the biggest show of the year. While Cornette's work in front of the camera is well documented, few realize that the former photographer for several pro wrestling magazines is also the brains behind the inventive and unique moves his tag team and Bubba use. Cornette spend the entire year of 1986 working for Jim Crockett Promotions, and his weekly national exposure made him one of the major names and faces in the business.

TED DIBIASE

Real name: Ted DiBiase
Size: 6-2½, 240
Birthday: January 14, 1954
Years Pro: 12

While Ted DiBiase can't be classified as one of the big newsmakers of 1986, his work in the ring is well respected by wrestlers and fans alike. DiBiase turned babyface in the Mid South area just as 1985 was ending, and spent much of the latter portion of the year feuding with The Freebirds. He also made several tours of Japan, with partner Stan Hansen. The duo of West Texas State University alumni retained the Japanese version of the World tag team title throughout the year, including winning the tag team tournament in 1985 and placing second in 1986. DiBiase's ability to

shine both on offense and defense in either a technical Japanese-style match or an all-out Mid South style brawl make him arguably the finest in-ring performer active. DiBiase will certainly remain a top-of-the-card performer both in Japan and in the UWF area in 1987 as well.

"HACKSAW" JIM DUGGAN

Real name: James Duggan
Size: 6-3, 280
Birthday: (unlisted--age 33)
Years Pro: 9

The former Southern Methodist University linebacker remained for the third year in a row as the top drawing card in the Mid South area. Duggan held the North American title for the first time in early 1986, before the title was retired and replaced by the UWF heavyweight title. While Duggan's main events against the likes of Dick Slater, One Man Gang, Buzz Sawyer and Terry Gordy were wild brawls in the ring, the biggest news Duggan made was in his attempt to leave the UWF to work for Titan Sports. At one point, Duggan seemed committed to the move, only to find that his two-year contract, signed in April, prevented such a move until the spring of 1988. However, as the year went on, a combination of the UWF deciding to bank its future on Steve Williams and Duggan's persistence in wanting to leave saw the UWF release Duggan from his obligations, and 1987 looks to be the year Duggan returns home to New York as a star. Duggan worked as a TV jobber for Titan in 1980-81 before heading South and making a big name for himself. Duggan will also not-so-fondly remember 1986 as a year of several career-threatening injuries. The most serious occurred at the UWF tournament, where a bolt in the ringpost dented his skull and caused a concussion and severe blood-loss. He also received neck whiplash while spearing One Man Gang in a later match. Duggan also underwent arthroscopic knee surgery after he hurt the knee while touring Japan in January. Duggan made two Japanese tours in 1986, but wasn't able to establish himself as a top name because of his weakness in technical wrestling moves. His brawling, however, is amongst the tops in the business. His move to Titan may be the blow Titan needed to finally, after three years, be able to establish itself as a consistent draw in the Southwest.

RIC FLAIR

Real name: Richard Fliehr
Size: 6-0, 230
Birthday: February 25, 1950
Years Pro: 14

Thought by many to be the greatest all-around performer in the history of the business, 1986 was just another year for the NWA World champion. Flair won the Wrestler of the Year award for the sixth year in a row.

by his usual landslide. Flair was also rated No. 1 in the top 50 poll for the seventh consecutive year. As a performer, Flair probably has more respect, both amongst the experts, his peers and the smart fans as any wrestler since the days of Lou Thesz. As Jim Crockett Promotions had its biggest year to date, so did Flair as a drawing card, headlining some of the largest gates of the year including a near \$1 million gate at Starcade '86 against Nikita Koloff. While there is no doubt that among the general public, Flair has nowhere near the name appeal nor drawing power of Hulk Hogan, neither is his ring superiority questioned. Flair actually had one of his toughest years as champion, having for the most part to defend his title against the likes of Dusty Rhodes, Ron Garvin and Nikita Koloff all too often, foes who don't have the agility to compliment Flair's skills. As the NWA title became basically a regional title for Crockett, Flair's variety of foes was fewer this year than in any other, and his memorable matches were fewer than in the past as well. Nevertheless, two of the finest matches of the year, as usual, were Flair matches--July 5 in Charlotte against Ricky Morton and February 14 in Orlando against Barry Windham.

THE FABULOUS FREEBIRDS

(TERRY "BAM BAM" GORDY)

Real name: Terry Gordy
Size: 6-3½, 290
Birthday: April 27, 1961
Years Pro: 11

(MICHAEL P.S. HAYES)

Real name: Michael Seitz
Size: 6-2, 240
Birthday: March 29, 1959
Years Pro: 10

(BUDDY "JACK" ROBERTS)

Real name: Dale Hey
Size: 5-9½, 220
Birthday: (unlisted, age 39)
Years Pro: 21

Collectively and singularly, The Freebirds have remained one of the best and most important groups in the business. Terry Gordy, through winning the UWF tournament on May 30 in Houston and retaining the title through early November, finally got the respect from the general fan as a top-10 calibre singles wrestler that he's probably deserved for almost a decade. Hayes, as the mouthpiece of the team, was a key factor in the Universal Wrestling Federation television show getting such rave reviews due to his work on color commentary, and his key part in most of the best angles. If there had been an award for comeback wrestler of the year, it would have definitely gone this time out to Buddy Roberts. Considered by most as a past-prime whipping boy, Roberts established himself once again as an important cog in the Freebird

wheel. In fact, the Freebirds move from the Dallas-based World Class office to the UWF may have been the single most significant wrestling move of the year. The Freebirds, as the established lead heels on the Texas scene, paved the way for the UWF's expansion into the Dallas market. As some of the most unpredictable wrestlers around, who knows what surprises 1987 may bring.

TATSUMI "DRAGON" FUJINAMI

Real name: Tatsumi Fujinami
Size: 5-9, 225
Birthday: December 23, 1953
Years Pro: 16

Considered by most as the best all-around wrestler in Japan, 1986 was the year Fujinami's name became placed by most experts in the elite class with Ric Flair. A wrestler with no visible weaknesses and the unique knack of bringing out the best in any type of opponent, while still being able to look impressive himself. The man who put junior heavyweight wrestling on the map in Japan, and rated among the 25 greatest pro wrestlers of all-time by Lou Thesz may finally be getting his deserved push in 1987 as his long-time senior star, Antonio Inoki, appears to be on his ninth life. If there is a question to be asked about Fujinami, it is when will the injuries catch up with him, both physically and mentally. Fujinami, in the past year, underwent knee surgery, then missed several weeks after suffering a concussion after severe karate kicks against Akira Maeda, then broke his jaw and needed an operation after an injury suffered against Konga the Barbarian. Fujinami and Kengo Kimura held the IWGP World tag team titles for almost all of 1986, finally vacating the title when Kimura challenged Fujinami to a match. Known as the best conditioned grappler in the pro ranks, Fujinami added 10-15 pounds of solid muscle this year to solidify his position as a heavyweight, with little negative to show for it.

STAN "THE LARIAT" HANSEN

Real name: John Hansen
Size: 6-2, 285
Birthday: (unlisted--age 37)
Years Pro: 14

One of the most controversial grapplers in the business. Hansen started the year out as one of the most highly regarded men in both the U.S. and Japan. He held the PWF title in Japan and the AWA World title in the U.S., which he had won from Rick Martel on December 29, 1985 at the Meadowlands in New Jersey. Hansen split time in the first half of the year between the AWA and Japan. He also came into 1986 as part of Japan's leading tag team with Ted DiBiase, holding the World tag team belts and winning the 1985 tag team tournament. But as 1985 was the year Hansen's reputation in the U.S. nearly reached its Japanese-level, 1986 was the year

things changed. Hansen had one of the most marked falls from the top of anyone. Conditioning problems led to some disappointing matches in Japan, particularly in singles events against Riki Choshu. His tenure as AWA champion ended with a bang as he walked out of a Denver dressing room on June 29 when he was scheduled to drop the title to Nick Bockwinkel. He continued to defend the title while in Japan in July, before finally giving up his claim to the title. He defeated Jumbo Tsuruta for the International title on July 31, but lost the belt back on October 21. He earlier lost the PWF belt to Choshu, but he and DiBiase kept the tag team belts throughout the year. But there is no doubt his status in Japan has dropped, and many have even said DiBiase had to carry him in some of their matches for him to retain some of his former reputation. At the same time, his singles matches with Tsuruta were excellent. He hasn't worked for a major U.S. office since walking out on the AWA, and his name has disappeared from the minds of U.S. fans. What the future holds for the former West Texas State University linebacker is unknown.

OWEN HART

Real name: Owen Hart
Size: 5-11, 205
Birthday: (unlisted--age 20)
Years Pro: six months

What are the odds that a mere rookie could be considered as the wrestler with the widest variety of moves in North America? Pretty slim, unless this wrestler was probably learning his first high spots at the age of five. This wrestler has a half dozen older brothers, all of whom dabbled in the pro game and several of whom are established stars. This same wrestler had his first pro match at the age of 14, and spent a lot of time on summer vacations since his junior high days, filling in for wrestlers who missed bookings, under a hood. This same wrestler who kept his amateur eligibility because his occasional pro bouts were under a hood, captured the Canadian collegiate championship in 1986, then turned to the pro game for his father's Stampede Wrestling promotion full-time when school let out in June. Most grapplers in this position get an unwarranted push, but few would argue that Owen Hart, whose older brother Bret is a far bigger name in the profession, won't be one of the hottest names in wrestling in Japan throughout the 1990s. Just as Calgary produced The Cobra, Nobuhiko Takada, Davey Boy Smith, Bret Hart and the Dynamite Kid, the best technical wrestlers of the mid-1980s, Owen Hart, the master of flying moves seems destined to follow in their footsteps. Hart wrestled several shows for Titan Sports under the ring name Owen James, and outshined all the veteran talent. The only thing

standing in Hart's way of becoming a major WWF superstar is his lack of size, and need to learn some personality.

BOBBY "THE BRAIN" HEENAN

Real name: Raymond Heenan
Size: 5-11½, 235
Birthday: unlisted
Years Pro: 22

The manager who has stood the test of time probably had more national exposure this year than any other. Established, partially because of his own front office influence, as the leading manager for Titan Sports. However few would argue Heenan is, and has been for decades, one of the best managers in the game. Heenan was at the center of all the key WWF angles, managing the likes of Paul Orndorff, King Kong Bundy, Harley Race, John Studd and Hercules Hernandez in 1986. Heenan, who spent most of his career in the AWA seconding the likes of Nick Bockwinkel and Blackjack Lanza, also made a name for himself as the color commentator on the WWF syndicated TV package.

HULK HOGAN

Real name: Terry Bollea
Size: 6-5, 285
Birthday: (unlisted, age 33)
Years Pro: 9

The biggest name in the pro wrestling business, bar none. Hogan's track record as a drawing card in 1986 probably exceeds that of anyone in the 100-year history of the business. Partially, perhaps even mainly responsible for this is the Saturday morning cartoon series in which his character is the star. Hogan has held the WWF championship for three years, yet crowds haven't started to wane a bit at his title defenses although crowds as a whole for the WWF are way down. 1986 saw Hogan's drawing power proven night after night, but the biggest nights were March 31--Wrestlemania II--a financial flop because of undisciplined expenses, but still an event which drew around 350,000 fans to closed-circuit locations and was beamed via pay-per-view in more than 250,000 more households. Another biggie was on August 28, when Hogan and Paul Orndorff set a record for the largest live crowd in North American history, some 74,080 at Exhibition Stadium in Toronto paying \$800,000 U.S. While hardcore fans cringe at the mention of his name, and the general public is turned off by his act, the kids of America have seemed him one of the heroes of society. In the ring Hogan's matches got shorter and less eventful than even before, as he relied more on expected antics such as cupping his ear and posing, but for all the detractors, he is the only wrestler whose name alone can fill almost any building in the country.

MISSY HYATT

Real name: Melissa Ann Hiatt
Size: 5-8, 110

Birthday: (unlisted)
Years pro: 1½

When Missy Hyatt got involved in the pro wrestling game late in 1985, she was just another excuse to keep the long-since worn-out Sunshine in the Dallas area spotlight. But things soon changed. As the valet of John Tatum, her then real-life boyfriend, Hyatt ran around the World Class area culminating in mud matches in nearly every city. Soon after, Hyatt and Tatum took their act to the UWF and as Missy Hyatt, the walking riot, she became the most talked about female in the pro wrestling business. Hyatt's split from John Tatum, and subsequent romance and engagement to Eddie Gilbert turned into a major wrestling angle. While as valet for Hot Stuff and Hyatt, Inc., she caused riots at ringside and generally got fans attention. If her body wasn't enough to do so, she developed several subtle and not-so-subtle mannerisms at ringside which caused her, in a late rush, to be regarded as the top valet in the business. While nobody complains about her heat-getting ability, as 1987 begins it is obvious Hyatt's character is being toned down. Several reasons, from internal problems to problems with the fans can be blamed. But in more ways than one, Missy Hyatt was one of wrestling's hottest numbers in 1986.

ANTONIO INOKI

Real name: Antonio Inoki
Size: 6-0, 210
Birthday: February 20, 1943
Years Pro: 27

The Japanese wrestling legend made news both in and out of the ring for his exploits to somehow remain in the wrestling spotlight. While in his prime, most will agree that Inoki was one of the best technical wrestlers around. However he has certainly been surpassed by a young corps of wrestlers in every way except promotional push. Probably the hottest of the young wrestlers was Akira Maeda, a man who if matched up with Inoki would have drawn the biggest crowds of the year. But the match never took place for internal reasons. Inoki did remain on top this year, and inside the ring probably had his best year since a near career-ending injury suffered in a mishap with Hulk Hogan in 1983. Inoki has regained tremendous condition and gotten back some lost endurance, but in order to do so, dropped so much weight that he appeared much smaller than his foes, whom he always vanquished. Among Inoki's highlights were re-winning both the IWGP singles tournament and the tag team tournament with partner Yoshiaki Fujiwara, a tremendous 60 minute draw with Bruiser Brody which drew a gate of \$450,000, a submission victory over

Andre the Giant (probably the first time the Giant ever gave up in a match in nearly 20 years) and a big series of wins over Fujiwara. However one match nearly ended things for Inoki, who is already on his ninth life. His October 9 debacle against boxer Leon Spinks, which saw Spinks mess up the finish of a match which was already pathetic, nearly ruined Inoki for good. This came on the heels of Inoki's young rival, Maeda, scoring a win in a mixed match that was dubbed by most as the most exciting and hardest fought martial arts challenge match in history. As 1987 begins, Inoki is still on top, but many wonder how long before he is forced from the top. At the same time he faces another crisis, as his New Japan promotion is threatened with the loss of network television at the end of this season due to poor ratings.

NIKITA KOLOFF

Real name: Scott Simpson
Size: 6-2, 260
Birthday: (unlisted, age 27)
Years pro: 3

"The Russian Nightmare," one of the most effective, yet least talented heel finds of the past decade, broke into the big leagues as an attraction this year. The impetus, for the most part, was his best-of-seven series for the U.S. title against Magnum T.A. which he subsequently won. Ironically it was the auto accident that ended Magnum's career that turned Koloff into the first Russian babyface to get national attention in history. While possessing almost no ability, Koloff makes up for it with the best set of eyes in the business which put across animalistic ferocity. It's hard to believe Koloff will stay a babyface for long, but few doubt he'll remain one of wrestling's biggest names for quite a while. Koloff's reputation was so strong he even got to headline in Japan, although in the land of the Rising Sun, his lack of ability was exposed and fans were bored by his main event matches.

JERRY LAWLER

Real name: Jerry Lawler
Size: 5-10, 225
Birthday: November 12, 1949
Years Pro: 16

"The King" of Memphis wrestling faced his toughest tests outside the ring in the form of promotions invading his territory. While Lawler managed to keep opposition at bay in Memphis, there is no doubt that the wrestling wars have turned Jarrett Promotions into basically a minor league operation. Lawler himself spent most of the first two months of the year on the sidelines, having lost a loser leaves town match. He mainly wrestled in Hawaii and California for Polynesian Pro Wrestling before returning to Memphis to a sellout crowd in a series of grudge matches with Bill Dundee and Buddy Landel. Over the summer, Lawler's biggest in-ring foe was Bam Bam Bigelow, who was phased out when the promotion no longer wanted to pay him a guarantee. As 1987 gets started, Lawler and long-time babyface Tommy Ric

Tommy Rich are rivals. Lawler's strenths have always been to make unrealistic scenarios and through strong interviews, make them even more realistic than anything other promotions have to offer. A local legend since he's headlined the territory for 13 years, Lawler has his own talk show in Memphis and is one of the best-known celebrities in town.

LEX LUGER

Real name: Larry Pfohl
Size: 6-3, 255
Birthday: June 2, 1958
Years Pro: 1½

The 1986 version of the hottest newcomer in town. Luger, a former USFL football player possessing good looks and a good body, was thrust into the spotlight as Florida's top babyface after switching from being a heel in the spring. While he never established himself as a draw, he received more magazine coverage than any newcomer in years because he was photogenic. Weak both in the ring and on interviews, but has always been pushed as a superstar and lost few of his main events during the year. Won the Southern title in February from Jesse Barr and held it for the remainder of the year, with the exception of one week. In 1987 Luger will leave Florida for the Crocketts. In that territory he'll have to share the spotlight with wrestlers with better bodies and farther advanced in the ring. Whether it causes him to improve so he'll live up to his press credentials will be interesting to watch. Certainly he'll have the opportunity to be one of the biggest names in the profession. But then again, so did Billy Jack Haynes.

AKIRA MAEDA

Real name: Akira Maeda
Size: 6-2½, 220
Birthday: January 24, 1959
Years Pro: 9

The former karate fighter turned into one of the biggest names in mainstream wrestling, and one of the most rebellious. Maeda has long had the goal to be the kind of a wrestler who not only has a lot of success, but totally changes the face of the business. Maeda wanted to turn pro wrestling into a non-showmanship sport, with everything but real outcomes. After spending 1985 working for the old Universal Wrestling Federation, Maeda's return to New Japan was met with a lot of stubbornness. He didn't want to do high spots, which made his matches good technical displays, but oftentimes quite boring. Even as the year went on, he had trouble compromising his style unless he went against Tatsumi Fujinami or Kengo Kimura. Maeda's all-out brawl with Fujinami on June 12 was one of the year's classic matches. Later Maeda

teamed with Osamu Kido for a brief stint as IWGP World tag team champions. Maeda had another memorable match on October 9 when he defeated World Karate Association cruiser-weight champion Don Nakaya Neilsen via 5th round submission in a thrilling bout. This caused a large outcry for Maeda to replace Inoki as the top star for New Japan. Those who made the outcry forgot the fact Maeda still hadn't learned to work good matches with Americans, and his public outbursts against American wrestlers and the wrestling style used in the U.S. made him no friends abroad. Maeda seems to have toned down his aggressive stance, many say because a few U.S. wrestlers showed him he wasn't as tough as he talked. But 1987 probably will be the year Inoki crumbles, and Maeda could be the young superstar who picks up the pieces.

MAGNUM T.A.

Real name: Terry Allen
Size: 6-2, 230
Birthday: June 12, 1959
Years Pro: 8

The man destined to be Ric Flair's replacement as NWA champion saw 1986 end in tragedy. In October, while driving home from a Charlotte bar, Magnum T.A. crashed his Porsche 911 and wound up paralyzed. Even as the year ends, he has little movement in his legs. For a few days it was doubtful if he would even live. Literally thousands of calls, cards, sets of flowers, etc. inundated the Charlotte Memorial Hospital. At times there were hundreds of fans in the hotel lobby sobbing. For much of the year, Magnum was the U.S. champion, a strap he'd won in November, 1985 from Tully Blanchard. He was stripped of the title just prior to the American Bash tour in the summer, and had a six-week long series with Nikita Koloff end in defeat. His regaining the title from Koloff was to occur on Thanksgiving, but the accident ended all that. While there is occasional talk of a comeback, the odds are greatly against that ever taking place. The realistic hope is that Magnum, who suffered a destroyed vertebrae in his neck which had to be reconstructed through taking bone from his pelvis, will eventually recover well enough to walk and lead a normal life.

DUMP MATSUMOTO

Real name: Kuaro Matsumoto
Size: 5-5, 220
Birthday: (unlisted, age 26)
Years Pro: 9

The greatest heel attraction in the history of women's pro wrestling became an international name in 1986. Matsumoto, a big name in Japan for a few years, shocked U.S. fans as she became the most remembered of the Japanese girls who appeared

weekly on the Tempo cable TV network. As the leading bad girl in the business, fans in two nations got to see her weekly persecute, pillage, devastate and all around wreck havoc on referees, TV announcers and any Japanese girl who stood in her path. Although women's wrestling peaked in Japan in 1985, largely due to the Crush Girls and Jaguar Yokota, injuries to both Crush's and the retirement of Yokota should have proven to be a disaster this year. Not so, as Dump and her band of "Bad Girls" kept things hopping. She even had a very brief tour of the United States, but against Moolah's excuses for wrestlers, there was little noteworthy about it. Dump's hair match on November 7th against Chigusa Nagayo drew a \$174,000 gate, something few male wrestlers could brag of in these or any other times.

PAUL CRNDORFF

Real name: Paul Orndorff
Size: 5-11½, 230
Birthday: October 29, 1949
Years Pro: 11

Certainly 1986 will go down as the most successful year financially in the career of Paul Orndorff. A top-of-the-line star since early in his career due to his physique and good athletic ability, but ironically, just as his athletic ability turned its back on him, he lucked into a goldmine. The goldmine was a feud with Hulk Hogan. Orndorff and Hogan had feuded earlier in 1984-85, but after Orndorff's babyface turn, then turn back on Hogan, the second time around rung cash registers like no feud in the sport's history. From the record-setting crowd in Toronto to sellouts in almost every major city in North America, Orndorff was having weeks where he was pulling in \$20,000. Orndorff had long been regarded as a top-flight worker, but most of his status had slipped away from and endless stream of poor matches with Don Muraco. A doctor's appointment late in the fall, right in the midst of his megabucks months brought in the dark cloud. Orndorff's pinched nerve in the neck was actually a series of dead nerves. One of his arms was virtually useless. His days as a top athlete were over. Orndorff ignored this and continues to wrestle, but the difference is noticable and with no strength left in the shoulder, the ability to lift weights hard is gone. More important than the loss of the ring ability in the strange world of pro wrestling is the loss of the physique. Orndorff has managed to somewhat maintain it, but friends in Allentown can

can only do so much for a physique. 1987 will probably see Orndorff survive on name value like Jimmy Snuka, but his days as a superstar are over.

RODDY PIPER

Real name: Roderick Toombs
Size: 6-1½, 230
Birthday: April 17, 1951
Years Pro: 15

One of the most important men in the pro wrestling world stayed unpredictable in 1986. Piper started the year as the best heel in the business, a status he had held for two solid years. He started out, after a series of bouts mainly with Paul Orndorff, building up to a big match with Mr. T at Wrestlemania. Bring out the coat hangers for that one, as it was possibly the biggest abortion in the history of the sport. Piper's foe was so bad that Piper became an instant babyface. Nobody knew exactly what that meant and it didn't matter at the time, as Piper was going to take six weeks off to film the movie "Body Slam," a David Wolfe flick. Six weeks was up and no sign of Piper. Piper was telling everyone who asked that he was retiring and going into boxing, a pretty ludicrous thought considering his age and the fact his showing against Mr. T was pretty pathetic in and of itself. He came back for one big show in Foxboro, Mass., told everyone in sight that was it, he's through save for two or three big shows a year. He's paid his dues and all that, but in reality he was setting up his babyface turn. Everyone in and out of wrestling thought this would be the hottest angle of the fall, because pro wrestling theory has it that the hotter a guy is as a heel, the hotter he'll be as a character babyface when he turns, and nobody was hotter as a heel than Piper. So why didn't it work? A million reasons have been given, all probably have some substance. As 1987 begins, it wouldn't surprise many to see Piper end the year back in his familiar heel role.

DUSTY RHODES

Real name: Virgil Runnels, Jr.
Size: 6-1, 310
Birthday: October 12, 1945
Years Pro: 20

What can be said about the most overpromoted wrestler in the game? Especially when the man doing the overpromoting is Dusty's biggest fan, Virgil Runnels, Jr. But what Dusty Rhodes lacks in conditioning, Virgil Runnels makes up for in knowing every trick to get oneself over without actually working in the ring, and keeping oneself over by revolving all major angles around oneself and surrounding oneself with heels that are some of the best workers, and best ---lickers in the game. Seriously, as the booker for Jim Crockett Promotions, Rhodes had

a big year, as the company became a strong No. 2 promotion, gaining ground on the powerful McMahon empire throughout the year, even to the point of outdrawing McMahon in some of his Northeastern cities. Nobody expects Rhodes to provide too much action in 1987, but he'll probably create more behind the scenes than almost anyone in the game.

THE ROAD WARRIORS

(HAWK)

Real name: Michael Hegstrand
Size: 6-3, 275
Birthday: September 12, 1957
Years Pro: 4

(ANIMAL)

Real name: Joe Laurinidas
Size: 6-1, 285
Birthday: January 26, 1960
Years Pro: 4

With the exception of Hulk Hogan, the hottest attractions on the current pro wrestling scene. There is probably no act in wrestling today that is equally as hot in both the United States and Japan besides the Road Warriors. The former key free agents in the business have turned basically into employees of Jim Crockett Promotions, but with a tad more independence than the regular crew. The team that won't lose, won't sell (too much), and draws more fans than any other started the year feuding with The Russian trio of Ivan & Nikita Koloff & Khrusher Khrushchev. The feud started out hot, and many figured it to be feud of the year. But the bouts themselves weren't too good (being nice) and the endings--well, when one team won't lose, it's hard to keep a feud interesting for months. In the latter part of the year, the Roadies feuded with the Midnight Express. While the matches were better, it wasn't exactly a classic since, you got it, one team won't lose. Even worse, nobody believed the smaller Midnight Express had a chance against the Minneapolis Monsters. The Road Warriors do deserve credit for several things, however. Hawk broke his leg in two places on October 29 in Japan, and was back in action by Thanksgiving for an important scaffold match main event at Starcade '86. Another is the Road Warriors never had to improve. They would have remained over in a big way simply through their physiques and gimmick. But they did improve and are regarded as fairly competent wrestlers, even if they're still almost impossible to work give-and-take matches with. The worst thing the Road Warriors have done is create an environment where promoters have taken totally untalented muscleheads (ie The Warlord and Dingo Warrior) and tried to make main event talent out of them. That may have been

the single most distressing development of 1986.

THE ROCK AND ROLL EXPRESS (RICKY MORTON)

Real name: Rick Morton
Size: 5-9, 205
Birthday: September 21, 1956
Years Pro: 8

(ROBERT GIBSON)

Real name: Ruben Kane
Size: 6-0, 210
Birthday: July 19, 1958
Years Pro: 9

The gimmick which, four years after its inception, hit it big on a nationwide basis. As the cute teen-idols, Morton and Gibson became the ultimate babyfaces in a traditional sense. Always either holding or challenging for the NWA World Tag Team Title kept the Rock'n'Roll in the spotlight all year, and through the booking of Dusty Rhodes, they were continually "injured" year-round to provide for the element of sympathy. The two became so popular, that early in the year they even pushed a feud between Morton and Ric Flair. While they were some of Flair's best matches of 1986, the fact is for the most part they were very disappointing at the gate. There were plenty of reasons for that, the main one being nobody thought Morton had a chance at beating Flair, and that the two were a tag team act. However, the "shelf-life" of a teeny-bopper hearthrob is generally two to three years. Morton and Gibson have been in the national spotlight for 1½ years. 1987 will determine whether they'll be the victims of too much exposure and last year's Bobby Sherman, or if they'll be the exception to the rule.

RANDY SAVAGE

Real name: Randy Poffo
Size: 6-1, 220
Birthday: November 15, 1952
Years Pro: 12

After a decade-long stint as being wrestling's best undiscovered talent, Savage became one of the top ranked stars in the nation. He took the Intercontinental title from Tito Santana in February which established him as the No. 1 heel in Titan Sports, especially with Roddy Piper spending the summer playing "Let's Make a Deal." Almost as well known is the other half of the Savage act, wife Elizabeth Poffo, who plays the only female valet who doesn't try to get heat. Strangely, Elizabeth has turned into quite a babyface, while Savage remains a heel, so Savage does the caveman act of mistreating his wife (even though we aren't supposed to know they've been married for several years). Savage is an exceptional wrestler, when he wants to be. Luckily that isn't very often, or he'd outshine nearly everyone in the profession. Still, his matches with Tito Santana and Ricky Steamboat were probably the

best bouts Titan had to offer in 1986. Got national exposure through appearing in a TV ad for Rubik's Puzzle. There's still a tremendous amount of steam left in Savage, and down the road, there's the inevitable babyface turn. Many are now wondering how come it took this long for promoters to discover this "instant" star.

RICKY STEAMBOAT

Real name: Richard Blood
Size: 5-10, 205
Birthday: February 28, 1953
Years Pro: 11

"The Dragon" made it through 1986 as the best and hardest worker in the large Titan Sports stable. Always in condition, Steamboat was able to carry an overweight Don Muraco early in the year to some decent, and an occasional good match. In mid-year, Steamboat got involved in a vendetta with Jake Roberts. By Titan's standards, these were some of the best bouts around. As the year ended, it was the Steamboat-Randy Savage feud. Steamboat seems locked into his niche as the babyface who is constantly out for revenge against the bigger heels. While he's behind both Hulk Hogan and Roddy Piper in popularity, he has the ability that neither have. The biggest news Steamboat made was the skit against Savage where he lost his voice. It's sometimes too bad that a great athlete has to participate in such a demeaning and childish skit to get attention, but such is pro wrestling. Those close to Steamboat say the reason he took few days off in '86 prior to his end-of-year vacation, was because he wants to make the money when the money is good, then walk away from the business. Of course Steamboat has threatened retirement before, and at one point only worked eight dates per week, something that Dusty Rhodes didn't take too kindly to, which is probably why he's now in Titan-land. Of course most big-name wrestlers say the same thing, but never truly can walk away. Certainly there is nobody on the horizon, save for Bret Hart, who will be able to challenge Steamboat as the group's best performer, which doesn't amount to much, but the relatively colorless Steamboat still remains a main force.

KERRY VON ERICH

Real name: Kerry Adkisson
Size: 6-2, 250
Birthday: February 3, 1960
Years Pro: 9

Wrestling's No. 1 teeny-bopper hearthrob in 1982-84 saw not only his status as a drawing card fade away, but nearly saw his career end due to a summer motorcycle wreck. After several major

operations, the foot was saved. But the rehabilitation process has been slow. With the most popular of the Von Erichs on the shelf, World Class Wrestling faded, and faded fast into virtually a dead promotion--a far cry from 1983 when it was the hottest promotion in North America. Kerry will return to wrestling sometime in 1987, probably late spring in the David Von Erich outdoor show in Texas Stadium. But will it be the same Kerry Von Erich, with the most perfect physique and one of the best dropkicks in pro wrestling? Or will it be a 27-year-old whose best nights were in the ring with Ric Flair a few years ago? More than anything else, the future of World Class Wrestling hangs upon the answer to this question.

YOSHIAKI YATSU

Real name: Yoshiaki Yatsu
Size: 5-11, 235
Birthday: July 19, 1956
Years Pro: 6

Are pro wrestlers athletes? This question was answered in a big way this summer when Yoshiaki Yatsu, pro wrestler, entered the Japanese national freestyle wrestling championships--and won--pinning everyone who stood in his path. But his shocking win in a freestyle tournament after being out of the amateur sport for six years was not the reason Yatsu became an unquestioned superstar in the pro game. If there is any example of a wrestler who came into his own in 1986, Yatsu is the one. After six years in the business, Yatsu improved to the point he was rated as among the top five wrestlers in the world. He was pushed as a Japanese superstar as well--no longer doing jobs for the big names. He became a big name, as he and Riki Choshu captured the International tag team championship. They also participated in the best matches of the year against rivals Jumbo Tsuruta and Genichiro Tenryu. But all was not golden for Yatsu in 1986. His chance to prove to the world that pro wrestlers were indeed quality athletes was taken away by the International Olympic Committee, which decreed that pro wrestling was a sport, and therefore Yatsu was a professional athlete and unable to compete in the Olympics. Yatsu also suffered two major leg injuries during the year. As 1987 starts, Yatsu may very well reach his goal to be regarded as the No. 1 wrestler in Japan if he shows the same kind of improvement he did this past year. There's really only two people in his way, his mentor and tag team partner Riki Choshu--who has greater popularity but certainly not greater skill. The other is Tatsumi Fujinami, who wrestles for another promotion.

1986 WRESTLING OBSERVER RATINGS

The ratings here are based on the results of a survey of 32 wrestling experts. The wrestlers spot in the poll is listed on the left, and on the right is where the wrestler finished in previous years' polls. These ratings are based strictly on in-ring ability and work-rate when it comes to wrestling skill and athletic ability.

	85	84	83	82
1. Ric Flair.....	1	1	1	1
2. Ted DiBiase.....	3	20	8	3
3. Tatsumi Fujinami....	7	8	16	35
4. Yoshiaki Yatsu.....	19	30	57	--
5. Bobby Eaton.....	9	56	73	--
6. Terry Gordy.....	8	11	9	--
7. Nobuhiko Takada.....	27	21	--	--
8. Ricky Steamboat.....	12	10	21	23
9. Riki Choshu.....	6	6	13	--
10. Akira Maeda.....	13	24	--	--
11. Barry Windham.....	67	25	36	--
12. Tiger Mask.....	14	29	--	--
13. Tully Blanchard.....	25	61	70	--
14. Steve Williams.....	38	--	--	--
15. Bret Hart.....	37	48	--	--
16. Kuniaki Kobayashi..	20	32	--	--
17. Buzz Sawyer.....	50	47	23	26
18. Terry Taylor.....	29	65	--	--
19. Randy Savage.....	10	18	55	74
20. Bruiser Brady.....	5	3	2	6
21. Ricky Morton.....	54	--	--	--
22. Genichiro Tenryu...	22	67	--	--
23. Davey Boy Smith....	17	5	--	--
24. Chavo Guerrero.....	35	22	17	67
25. Brad Armstrong.....	39	63	--	--
26. Stan Hansen.....	4	9	7	10
27. Owen Hart.....	--	--	--	--
28. Hiro Saito.....	46	--	--	--
29. Dynamite Kid.....	2	2	5	47
30. Jim Duggan.....	28	70	49	--
31. Negro Casas.....	--	--	--	--
32. Jumbo Tsuruta.....	33	38	28	21
33. Bam Bam Bigelow.....	--	--	--	--
34. Magnum T.A.....	43	45	--	--
35. Black Tiger.....	34	42	51	--
36. Dick Murdoch.....	30	51	73	33
37. Jack Victory.....	--	--	--	--
38. Rick Martel.....	18	35	66	43
39. Keiji Muto.....	58	--	--	--
40. Sam Houston.....	--	--	--	--
41. Terry Funk.....	15	52	50	20
42. Buddy Landel.....	40	--	--	--
44. Animal Hamaguchi...	23	26	46	--
45. Kengo Kimura.....	49	39	--	--
46. Yoshiaki Fujiwara..	45	68	--	--
47. Arn Anderson.....	70	--	--	--
48. Tommy Rogers.....	--	--	--	--
49. Greg Valentine.....	53	46	22	37
50. La Fiera.....	48	--	--	--
51. Shiro Koshinaka....	--	--	--	--
52. Jake Roberts.....	--	--	--	--
53. Pirata Morgan.....	51	--	--	--
54. Badnews Allen.....	69	40	--	--
55. George Takano.....	26	12	--	--
56. Shawn Michaels.....	--	--	--	--
57. El Hijo Del Santo...	--	--	--	--
58. Hector Guerrero....	47	--	--	--
59. Shunji Takano.....	--	--	--	--
60. Curt Hennig.....	--	--	--	--
61. Super Strong Machine.	65	--	--	--
62. Harley Race.....	31	27	15	4
63. Eddie Gilbert.....	73	--	--	--
64. Jerry Lawler.....	61	57	33	30
65. Buddy Roberts.....	--	--	--	--

	85	84	83	82
65. Keiichi Yamada.....	--	--	--	--
66. Dennis Condrey.....	66	--	--	--
67. Nick Bockwinkel.....	55	74	26	8
68. Michael Hayes.....	56	--	--	--
69. Rick Steiner.....	--	--	--	--
70. Robert Gibson.....	60	--	--	--
71. Ronnie Garvin.....	--	--	--	--
72. Tim Horner.....	--	--	--	--
73. Masa Fuchi.....	--	--	--	--
74. Butch Reed.....	16	7	14	27
75. Koko Ware.....	64	--	--	--
Osamu Kido.....	--	--	--	--
Blackman.....	--	--	--	--

Others ranked on two or more ballots:
 Paul Orndorff, Bill Dundee, Pat Tanaka, Adrian Adonis, Matt Borne, Bobby Fulton, Chris Adams, Kazuo Yamazaki, John Tatum, Jerry Gray, Chris Champion, Marty Janetty, Road Warrior Animal, Dos Caras, Jacques Rougeau, El Canek, Manny Fernandez, Buddy Rose, Dory Funk, Tito Santana, Dick Slater

RATINGS NOTES: Just how impressive a wrestling career Ric Flair has had is exemplified by these ratings. Flair has been rated No. 1 in the Observer year-end poll now for six straight years, and was in the top 10 in the two previous polls as well since we started doing top 50's. This year may have been Flair's most impressive showing, as he was ranked No. 1 on 28 of the 32 ballots, and No. 2 on the other four. . . The highest ranked newcomers are rookies Owen Hart and Bam Bam Bigelow, and Mexican wrestler Negro Casas who made several impressive appearances in Los Angeles in his first trip stateside. . . The highest rated wrestlers to drop completely from the poll were Kerry Von Erich (injury) and Paul Orndorff (poor work rate due to nagging injuries). . . At press time, of the 77 wrestlers listed, four are between affiliations or semi-retired (Terry Funk, Bam Bam Bigelow, Buddy Landel and Buzz Sawyer). . . It's interesting that most of the top groups all had the same number of wrestlers ranked here, with Jim Crockett Promotions leading the way with 15 wrestlers, the Universal Wrestling Federation has 12 while New Japan, All Japan and World Wrestling Federation all have 11. Five others work for the Mexican promotions, four work for the AWA, while World Class, Calgary Stampede and Florida each have one ranked wrestler. . . Taking into account impending movement and the current situation, Crockett actually loses two, Watts loses two and gains one, while Titan gains one and loses one. . . It's interesting that Hulk Hogan, the single most publicized wrestler in the world didn't receive so much as one vote on any ballot.

LEADING NEWS STORIES OF 1986

It would take an entire book to try and adequately cover a year in the world of pro wrestling. The best way to describe 1986 was that the Darwinian process came to the fore. The biggest and strongest promotions survived and got bigger and stronger in the process. Those, for the most part, who either didn't have the resources, or didn't want to spend the resources, fell by the wayside. When 1986 began, fans talked of the "Big 5" promotions. Now, in 1987, it's either the big two or three, depending on what you consider the Universal Wrestling Federation.

The kingpins of the sport, from the fans side, remain pretty well the same. Hulk Hogan remains far-and-away the biggest draw in the game, a spot he's held onto now for some five years. Ric Flair is still, in most people's opinion, the No. 1 grappler in the business, a spot he's pretty well controlled for seven years. Leading heel Roddy Piper is now a babyface, and a surprisingly unsuccessful one at that. The Road Warriors have become virtually full-time employees of Jim Crockett Promotions, and have been a key point in their becoming a very strong No. 2 promotion that gains momentum as time goes on.

It's also been a year of tragedy. The biggest tragedy had to be the early February death of Gino Hernandez, 28, who had been a "name" performer since coming into the business as Jose Lothario's protege more than a decade ago, just out of high school. Hernandez' death, from cocaine abuse, was the last of the streak of a half-dozen or so wrestlers in their 20's who had died, presumably from complications brought on by drugs.

Thankfully, there have been no major deaths of active wrestlers since that time. However there have been many serious injuries.

Dynamite Kid, rated No. 2 in the world in 1984-85 behind Flair, saw his unbelievable bumps catch up with his only mortal body. His knees, shoulder and back were all suffering until in mid-December, his body that could do it all finally betrayed him. After having a disc removed in his lower back, some doctor's had written Dynamite Kid off. While he is expected to return around March, it is doubtful he'll ever approach his former greatness.

John Tatum, who had improved into being a top-flight wrestler, broke two ankles in a mid-November auto accident. Tatum, who faces several criminal charges in the case, conceivably could be back in the ring this spring as well.

But certainly the two most publicized injuries were to Magnum T.A. and Kerry Von Erich, two of the country's hottest young babyface talents.

In balloting from an impromptu editorial board of the Observer, we've picked the 10 biggest news stories of the past year and hopefully they will help tell the story of what kind of a year it has been.

1. MAGNUM T.A.'S CAREER PROBABLY FINISHED IN AN AUTO ACCIDENT

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (October 14) - Terry Wayne Allen, 27, better known to wrestling fans as Magnum T.A., suffered a broken neck and remained in critical condition for about a week as a result of an auto accident.

Allen was driving home from a Bennigan's in a Charlotte suburb at about 2:40 a.m. on a rainy night when apparently his Porsche 911 lost control and was decimated by a telephone pole.

The damage was such that it took rescue units one hour to cut Allen out of the car, which was obliterated. For the first day, Allen was given about a 50-50 chance to live through his ordeal. He underwent several major operations, including one operation which took out part of his pelvis so the doctors could use it to reconstruct a vertebrae in his neck which was destroyed in the accident.

Allen, who was being primed to be the eventual replacement for Ric Flair as NWA World champion, was paralyzed from the neck down for several weeks. At one point Charlotte Memorial Hospital was receiving up to 700 phone calls per hour and there were as many as 400 girls in the waiting room, a testament to his popularity.

Around Thanksgiving week Allen was transferred to a rehabilitation center in Charlotte. But progress has been slow. He's regained good movement of his arms, and is able to eat by himself. He's also been put in water in an attempt to slowly regain the ability to walk.

Wrestling generally has a difficult time dealing with reality and tragedy. Viewers of the Jim Crockett Promotions' TV shows, where Allen was one of the biggest stars, were told of the accident, but given false hope that he would be returning to wrestling--at best very much of a longshot. In fact, before its Starcade show on Thanksgiving, the organization distastefully used the accident not only to create its biggest angle, that of Nikita Koloff turning babyface (originally Koloff and Magnum were to wrestle at Starcade and Ric Flair would be meeting Ron Garvin), but tried to use his condition as part of the hype for the card.

2. MID SOUTH BECOMES UWF, ATTEMPTS TO BE THE THIRD NATIONAL PROMOTION

For several years, Mid South Sports, Inc., under the direction of Bill Watts, has been considered to be one of the best run regional outfits in the country. The company had grown, both in profits and in region covered, every year since starting as a New Orleans-based outfit.

But 1985 wasn't a banner year for Mid South, after breaking gate record after gate record the year before. A fall in the oil industry took its toll on the economy in many of its major cities in Louisiana and Texas. The increase in television exposure from other groups took its toll as well, just as it did to everyone of the smaller groups. Its partnership with the Dallas-based Southwest Sports, Inc. (World Class Wrestling) went out the window, with legal action to follow, so getting out-of-area talent like Ric Flair, the Von Erichs and the Rock'n'Roll Express became increasingly more difficult.

In early 1986 the decision was reached. It was either fall by the wayside, as several of the mid-level promotions were doing around them, or try and find their own market niche on a national basis.

In March, Mid South Wrestling became the Universal Wrestling Federation--taking its name from a former Japanese promotion of the same name. Similarly to the defunct Japanese group, the UWF tried to find its niche as the toughest and most serious wrestling promotion in the country.

On May 30, the UWF held a tournament in Houston to crown its first Universal champion. After a few bloodbaths and out-of-control brawls, and even a very serious legitimate injury to Jim Duggan, the dust cleared with Terry Gordy as the first champion.

Probably the key events in the UWF's year were first, in the early spring, Ken Mantell left his job as booker for World Class, and came here. Mantell followed by bringing in virtually every major WCCW attraction save the Von Erich family--starting with The Freebirds, John Tatum, One Man Gang, Missy Hyatt, Missing Link, Jack Victory, Sunshine, Iceman King Parsons and Chris Adams. That, along with retaining the UWF corps of babyfaces--Duggan, Ted DiBiase, Terry Taylor, Steve Williams and pushing The Fantastics as a top-ranked tag team, were the key personnel moves.

At the same time the new UWF show became heavily pushed in national syndication, where it now covers 63 percent of the country--second only to Titan Sports.

UWF also expanded heavily into the state of Texas, taking on their former business partners in Dallas. The first UWF event, in late July at Reunion Arena, which included most of the main-line Crockett attractions (Flair, Dusty Rhodes, Rock'n'Roll Express, Jim Garvin, Road Warriors, Magnum T.A. and Midnight Express), drew a solid \$97,000 gate. Several months later UWF began running bi-weekly shows in Fort Worth, for taping of the new Power Pro Wrestling show. While they are outdrawing the established World Class group--by averaging about 1,400 per show--they aren't exactly breaking box office records either.

As far as running a national promotion, the UWF's ambitious original plans have been toned down. With the exception for some forays into Pensacola, Memphis and Kansas City, few other major markets have been hit. It's expected UWF will test the waters in Los Angeles, Miami, and several other Midwestern markets where its TV is doing well before the summer.

But with the loss of Duggan and The Fantastics, and the frequent Japan tours by its three leading stars (DiBiase, Gordy and Williams), does the UWF have the "name" talent to compete with Crockett and McMahon? Can they find a market niche by having the "toughest" talent around and building around former NCAA runner-up Williams, who still needs to improve on interviews?

There are some who feel UWF can compete and do well nationwide. Others feel by the end of 1987, it's destined to be in the same spot the WCCW and AWA have fallen to.

3. GINO HERNANDEZ DIES OF COCAINE OVERDOSE

HIGHLAND PARK, Tex. (February 10) - Gino Hernandez, 28, a leading villain for World Class Wrestling, became another major sports figure to go down for the count at the hands of cocaine.

Hernandez, whose real name was Charles Wolfe, was brought up around pro wrestling and wrestled his first main events as a teenager. As the stepson of Luis Hernandez, known also as El Medico, Hernandez was, as they say, a second-generation competitor. After the elder Hernandez died, of a heart attack while touring Japan, Gino's goal was to get into the mat game.

It was only through the urging of Houston promoter Paul Boesch that he finished high school, and as part of a deal made upon completion, Boesch got him started as a teenaged babyface.

It was as a heel in Houston that Hernandez had his most success, teaming with Tully Blanchard as the original "Dynamic Duo." But while he achieved stardom early, his career from his early 20's was checkered as he faded in and out of the business. He worked a little in Hollywood in some soap operas, and gained a reputation for being unreliable as far as making his

bookings while working out of San Antonio.

In May, 1984, Hernandez went to work full-time for World Class and quickly became a leading heel. The highlight of his tenure was probably losing a hair vs. hair match, with partner Chris Adams, to the Von Erich brothers (Kerry & Kevin) at the Cotton Bowl before 26,000 fans.

4. HULK-A-MANIA DRAWS 70,000 IN TORONTO

TORONTO (August 28) - The largest crowd ever to witness a pro wrestling event in North America turned out here as Hulk Hogan wrestled Paul Orndorff at Exhibition Stadium.

The crowd, publicly claimed by Titan Sports as 64,800--but in reality 74,080 tickets were sold and approximately 69,300 were in the building due to ignoring fire marshall's warnings and an ticket office snafu. The gate was \$1.2 million Canadian, or \$800,000 in U.S. funds, also a North American record.

The crowd broke the previous North American record of 35,771 paid and \$541,730 on August 8, 1980 at Shea Stadium in New York for the Bruno Sammartino vs. Larry Zbyszko cage match.

Originally Titan officials were expecting a big crowd--some 25,000 to 30,000. But when 23,000 tickets were sold within days of the card being announced, the WWF realized something big was on its hands.

There are several things this record-setting night can be attributed to. First off, the card was part of the Canadian National Exhibit and a wrestling ticket got you into the exhibit free. Second, tickets weren't overpriced, ranging from \$12 to \$20 in Canadian funds (\$8 to \$13.75 U.S.). The impact of Hulk Hogan, and his feud with Paul Orndorff certainly can't be overlooked as well. In addition, Molson Breweries became sponsors of this event and earmarked an incredible \$200,000 just for television, radio and newspaper publicity.

For the record, the card itself wasn't too good, although by Titan standards it wasn't that bad. Hogan beat Orndorff via disqualification on top, plus Harley Race over Pedro Morales, Jacques & Raymond Rougeau downed Greg Valentine & Brutus Beefcake, Billy Haynes pinned Hercules Hernandez, Ricky Steamboat pinned Jake Roberts, John Studd-King Kong Bundy-Bobby Heenan downed The Machines (Blackjack Mulligan & Bill "Superstar" Eadie) along with Lou Albano, Dick Slater over Mike Sharpe, Junkyard Dog beat Adrian Adonis via count out, Don Muraco drew King Tonga, Ted Arcidi beat Tony Garea and Brian Blair & Jim Brunzell beat Dory & Jimmy Jack Funk.

Hulk Hogan and Paul Orndorff drew sellouts in every other major city as well, but nothing like the night they filled up Exhibition Stadium in Toronto.

5. WRESTLERS FROM EIGHT PROMOTIONS CONVERGE ON NEW ORLEANS

NEW ORLEANS (April 19) - Jim Crockett Promotions, in association with Mid South Sports, undertook one of the most ambitious wrestling promotions of all-time here as 24 tag teams representing eight different promotions came for the first annual Jim Crockett Sr. Memorial Tag Team Tournament.

Besides several teams involving every big-name star from both the host promotions, the UWF and Jim Crockett's own NWA flagship group, also represented were Championship Wrestling From Florida (The Fabulous Ones), Heart of America Promotions (The Batten Twins), Big-Time Wrestling from Oregon (Mike Miller & Bobby Jagers), Warrior Sports (Buddy Landel & Bill Dundee), International Wrestling from Montreal (Rick Martel & Dino Bravo--although the latter didn't wrestle due to outside-the-ring problems encountered by Bravo), and All Japan Pro Wrestling (Giant Baba & Tiger Mask).

The card was so big that two sessions were held at the Superdome, starting at 2 p.m. that day, with the show lasting some seven-and-a-half hours--probably the longest pro wrestling show in several years.

By and large, fans weren't disappointed, as the Road Warriors downed Magnum T.A. & Ron Garvin to win the Crockett Cup, and a supposed \$1 million first prize. In addition to the tournament, Ric Flair beat Dusty Rhodes via disqualification for the NWA title and Jim Duggan pinned Dick Slater in a match for the UWF North American title.

However, the promoters were disappointed. Only 3,000 fans showed up for the afternoon show in the 70,000 seat Superdome. The evening part of the show drew close to 13,000 with the combined gate roughly \$180,000.

What was significant about this card is that it was the last one in which so many promotions cooperated together on. Since this show, the NWA and UWF have gone their own way and for the most part, are bitter rivals. Crockett's NWA group's invasions of Florida and Memphis have severed relations with both of those group, and Crockett himself has taken over the Central States promotion.

The second Crockett Cup will take place on two days, April 10 and 11 at the Baltimore Arena. While it promises to be a big show, the biggest question is where will Crockett find 25 teams when he gets no cooperation from the other promotions? Well, I've always wanted to see the Mulkey brothers live.

6. AWA FALLS FROM MAJOR LEAGUE STATUS

For more than a decade, the American Wrestling Association has smugly referred to itself as "The Major League of Professional Wrestling."

While many would argue that connotation, since the group's in-ring quality hasn't been the highest and the group has relied on too many past-their-prime wrestlers, what can't be argued is the AWA has had some major-league level gates in most of its core cities.

But that's no longer the case. The AWA is now the group that it seems wrestlers can't wait to get out of. One-by-one, big names and guys who think they are big names have fled the group, from the Road Warriors, Freebirds, Jim Garvin, Bruiser Brody, Stan Hansen, and so many others. Crowds at the St. Paul Civic Center used to average more than 10,000 at one point--a crowd of 6,000 was considered a disaster.

It's been a long time since the Civic Center housed 6,000 Gagne-enthusiasts, and with the exception of Wrestlerock, an ambitious card on April 19, the Twin Cities home of the AWA hasn't reached five figures all year. When 1986 ended, the word from the Civic Center was no more AWA. Find a new home, guys. It's pretty bad when your own home building turns its back on you.

For whatever reason, the summer in the Midwest has never been a good time for wrestling. But things got so bad this summer that some of the leading names were making \$300 some weeks and had to go into their savings, just to meet road expenses. Doesn't do much to help morale. No wonder virtually every name star the AWA has had, save Nick Bockwinkel, has either left, or put in notice to leave, before reconsidering.

The AWA title situation probably tells the story best. Jim Garvin & Steve Regal, who started the year as champs, lost the belts in January to Curt Hennig & Scott Hall. Garvin and Regal both left within weeks. Hall & Hennig were upset in the spring by Buddy Rose & Doug Somers--the former was a guy no other promotion even wanted, the latter an underrated guy who had been a jobber for his entire career and couldn't get heat with a blow torch.

Then came Wrestlerock at the Metrodome, drawing 16,000 fans and \$300,000 and the show was loaded with talent. Barry Windham was there. So was Jimmy Snuka. The Road Warriors were around and Michael Hayes and Jim Garvin returned. Bruiser Brody was going full-steam as a heel, while Verne Gagne was coming out of retirement for the 1527th time. But after that night, they were all gone--except for Snuka--and he'd been gone for years. Sgt. Slaughter and Kimala also left after the card, although nobody seemed to miss them. Harley Race and Rick Martel were in the same boat.

However, the ultimate embarrassment came on June 29. Stan Hansen, who had captured the AWA title from Martel on December 29 at the Meadowlands in New Jersey (another disaster we won't even get into is the Meadowlands Pro Wrestling USA promotion), walked out rather than lose the title to Nick Bockwinkel. As his subsequent Japanese jobs have shown, Hansen wasn't averse to doing a job. There were other reasons, rumored to be Hansen believing he was to defend the title in Japan in July and didn't know about having to lose the title until that night.

The new champion was Nick Bockwinkel, at 51-years-old. Trying to get Bockwinkel "over" as a World champion was handled with typical ineptness. While Bockwinkel has tremendous respect from both his peers and long-time fans, the marks weren't very respectful of a guy who was handed the title. They could have at least held a tournament. Then Bockwinkel goes and loses two dozen or so non-title matches to John Nord, a 295 pounder with an ego to match, and not enough ability for Sky Low Low. And to make matters worse, when it comes time for Nord to lose in the title matches with Bockwinkel, he decides to play Toilet Bowl freshener and Vanish. All of which made Bockwinkel's title reign smell like--you got it.

The AWA did have some bright spots, although they rarely were reflected in box office receipts. Rose & Somers proved to be a far better heel tandem than anyone had a right to expect. Their top challengers, the Midnight Rockers, two guys with no national rep named Marty Janetty and Shawn Michaels, turned out better than anyone had a right to expect. Curt Hennig also got it together to become the heir-apparent for Bockwinkel's title. But the rest of the AWA has been another story.

Shunji Takano, the best pure wrestler on the circuit, was totally misused. Larry Zbyszko, while great on interviews, is a zero in the ring. Ditto for Col. DeBeers. Jimmy Snuka is a zero both in the ring and on interviews, while Scott Hall, who they were banking on to be their superstar one year ago, has instead become a super-dud.

7. KERRY VON ERICH SUFFERS MAJOR INJURY - WORLD CLASS TAKES A TUMBLE

If you turn the clock back three years, did you ever, at that time, think World Class Wrestling would be in this kind of shape?

As 1983 came to a close, in many ways, World Class Wrestling was the hottest promotion in the country. And if anything, the future of the group only looked brighter as its top stars, particularly the Von Erich brothers, were only in their mid-20s.

The self-destructive nature of the von Erich family is now legend. David, the brother who seemed to have his act together the best, died in early 1984 while touring Japan. Younger brother Mike nearly died in September, 1985, from toxic shock syndrome. Kevin was plagued by shoulder problems. But Kerry, the superstar of the family, was riding high.

A little too high perhaps, because a motorcycle accident in early June put the end to Kerry's 1986 season, and threatens his career.

Von Erich suffered a dislocated hip and a broken ankle in the mishap, but the biggest problem was in his foot. He wasn't wearing shoes while riding the cycle, in fact was wearing nothing but gym shorts. The doctors said so much damage was done to the foot that it needed to be amputated. The family balked, and microsurgery took place, generally at best a 50-50 proposition.

The family handled the accident with typical honesty. First word, just days after Kerry had undergone 13 hours of surgery, was that he'd be back in about a month. After a month, the prognosis was switched to three months, all ludicrous. Apparently it was felt if they let it be known that Kerry was in such bad shape and his career was in jeopardy, that fans might turn away from the promotion, just as every major star sans the family already had.

It's seven months later, and sources close to the family say Kerry will return hopefully by the fall of 1987. He will never be the same, however.

With Von Erich gone, the promotion fell into the depths of depression. The crowds in Dallas and Fort Worth fell from several thousand per week, to below 500. The quality of the new wrestlers was the worst possible, with the exception of Buzz Sawyer and Matt Borne, who were there more because the mainline promoters didn't want them anymore.

Kerry Von Erich will certainly wrestle again, just like brother Mike did. And when he returns, crowds should pick up initially. But can World Class even hold out that long, with the UWF, and before long both WWF and probably Crockett heading to Dallas?

8. AMERICAN BASH ON TOUR

Nobody can fault Dusty Rhodes for lacking confidence. The 41-year-old Rhodes, possessor of little in the way of wrestling skill, was probably the No. 1 drawing card in the business for the latter half of the 1970s.

And as a booker for Jim Crockett Promotions, by and large, he's had amazing success. Sure he has his detractors and there are valid objections to some of the things he's done, but he's transformed Crockett into a solid and first-rate No. 2 promotion while all the competitors were self-destructing.

Rhodes' biggest success, so he thought, was going to be the month-long American Bash tour, from July 1 through August 2 hitting several major markets with big outdoor shows. To team with the Crockett wrestlers, who were in the midst of a successful year, Rhodes booked some solid Country Music acts, like Waylon Jennings, George Jones, Jessi Coulter, Joe Ely, Delbert McClinton and David Allan Coe, for a music-wrestling doubleheader which was sure to be a big money-maker. 14 shows were planned, with ticket prices raised unreasonably high, \$50 ringside and \$20 in the bleachers. Rhodes was predicting the 14 shows, in total, would gross \$8 million. His wrestlers were thinking about earning \$80-90,000 for the month, and with stars in their eyes, starting thinking about buying new homes, new cars, etc.

In this case Rhodes was guilty of overconfidence. The American Bash tour wasn't a complete flop, but some of the shows certainly were.

The tour opened July 1 in Philadelphia as 10,900 fans paid \$230,000 at Veterans Stadium. Everyone decided to claim the crowd was 20,000 or 30,000 and call it a success. July 3 at RFK Stadium in Washington, D.C. was tougher, as 6,500 paid \$135,000. July 4 in Memphis was a disaster, 800 paid--\$18,000. Finally on July 5 in Charlotte they breathed a sigh of relief with a near \$300,000 gate. There were some good nights, such as July 26 when 15,500 sold out the Greensboro Coliseum to see Dusty Rhodes beat Ric Flair and win the NWA title with a \$260,000 gate, but they were outweighed by more disappointment--Ric Flair vs. Road Warrior Animal drawing 3,900 in Cincinnati, the Flair-Rhodes rematch on August 2 in Atlanta drawing 7,600 (with kids prices cut to \$5 to save face) and on it went. In all, the tour grossed around \$1.6 million--or 20 percent of the original prediction, and in cities like Philadelphia, country music didn't exactly go over. In Charlotte and Greensboro, however, it was the perfect promotion.

They are closer to reality this year. The current plan is for the Bash to expand to 22 to 25 cities, however all the shows, with the exception of Charlotte, will be indoors. Hopefully ticket prices will be made more reasonable as well.

9. WRESTLEMANIA II - IS THAT WHAT THE WORLD REALLY WANTED TO SEE?

NEW YORK, CHICAGO and LOS ANGELES (April 7) - Was Wrestlemania II a success or failure?

As we build up to the third edition, that question can only be answered by your point of view. Vince McMahon went hog-wild, corralling every celebrity he could buy, to play ring announcer, guest referee, timekeeper and play-by-play commentator. He even got half a dozen football players to play pillow-fight Battle Royal, and booked the biggest pillow fight in history, between Roddy Piper and Mr. T.

If you consider what Titan was predicting for the event, it was a flop of catastrophic proportions. If you consider the way the crowds fell until mid-August, the same goes true. At the same time, the show probably grossed more money than any mat show in history. If you consider a conservative estimate of 350,000 fans live at the 200 or so closed circuit locations, that's just over \$5 million since average ticket price was \$15. The three live events grossed about \$1 million. Pay-per-view, at a \$15 average, went into another 250,000 or so homes--good for another \$3.75 million. Of course Titan doesn't get all those royalties, and with a \$7 million nut, the best guess is Titan wound up in the red, although not deeply enough for panic city, on the event.

The mass media, which embraced the first Wrestlemania, pretty well rejected the second. And interest may have been down. However, Titan Sports is over well enough to draw some big bucks for a yearly extravaganza, and it can be profitable as hell (for the night--if you factor in the post-WM attendance woes it's hard to make a case that this event is prudent) if costs aren't brought to the extreme--ie. booking 25 or so meaningless celebrities.

The headline events at Wrestlemania were a cage match from Los Angeles, where Hulk Hogan downed King Kong Bundy, a boxing match from New York, where Mr. T beat Roddy Piper by disqualification, and a Battle Royal, won by Andre the Giant, which included several footballers such as Refrigerator Perry, Jimbo Covert and Russ Francis.

Aesthetically, the bag was mixed. The color commentators on the fall-by-fall, Elvira and Cathy Lee Crosby were horrible--even worse than Titan's regular announcers. Susan St. James was bearable when compared to the other two, awful otherwise. Most of the matches weren't very good--in fact the top three finishers for Worst match of the year came from this card. A few were good--The Funks vs. Tito Santana & Junkyard Dog was surprisingly first-rate, Ricky Steamboat was tremendous in carrying Hercules Hernandez, while the wrestling savior of the card, the British Bulldogs winning the tag team title from Greg Valentine and an invisible Brutus Beefcake would have been a great match on any card.

At the same time, this card probably as much as anything else, broke Titan's momentum. Crowds have stayed down unless Hulk Hogan appears stemming from this show. Titan's sideshow image among mat fans was enhanced, with Jim Crockett Promotions the beneficiary. Most Titan insiders considered the thing a disaster. Bring on Andre the Giant vs. Hulk Hogan.

10. JAPAN HOSTS A BOX OFFICE SMASH, AND AN INOKI BASH

TOKYO, Japan (October 9) - It's strange how the best laid plans sometimes go awry.

Here was Antonio Inoki, the Japanese legend, in the twilight of his career trying to hang onto the No. 1 slot in New Japan Pro Wrestling. And here is Akira Maeda, 16-years-younger, with the stubbornness and lack of diplomacy of youth, clawing for the top spot.

This was to be the night to end Maeda's dreams, but instead it may be the night that finished Inoki. "Inoki Live," Japan's biggest show of the year draw 11,520 fans packing the Sumo Hall in Tokyo--and drew what may have been a World record gate, equivalent to \$837,000 in U.S. funds (ringside was \$200). On the surface, the battles were between Inoki and former World boxing champ Leon Spinks, and Maeda against current World Karate Association champ Don Nakaya Neilsen. But everyone knew the real battle was political, between Inoki and Maeda.

The plan was for Maeda to beat Neilsen, but in the process get taken apart and humiliated--and humbled most particularly. Then the grand master, Inoki, would toy with a famous boxing star, put him away, and fans would all know Inoki was king, even without him laying a hand on his young rival.

Neilsen came after Maeda early, giving him a concussion in the first round. But as the fight wore on, it turned into the best "mixed" match in the history of the fight game. Total intensity, tremendous heat and finally, in front of everyone, Neilsen blew up and was clawing to hang on. And Maeda put him away.

Inoki had a tough act to follow. And Spinks made it tougher. Leon didn't understand the concept of selling for Inoki's big moves, and for the most part humiliated Inoki. When it came time for Inoki to win, Spinks wouldn't go up for a back suplex, they tumbled to the mat, the ref was too embarrassed to even count. There was no cheer when the pin occurred, just a remembrance of Inoki's worst day--a decade earlier--against Muhammad Ali.

W R E S T L E R C F T H E Y E A R

FINAL RESULTS

1. RIC FLAIR (240).....	1,359
2. Hulk Hogan (22).....	304
3. Ted DiBiase (3).....	244
Akira Maeda (18).....	239
5. Terry Gordy (9).....	198
Honorable Mention: Riki Choshu	
144, Yoshiaki Yatsu	139

Ric Flair's winning the Wrestler of the Year award for the sixth year in a row is hardly a surprise. What was a surprise was just how decisively he won the award, and doing so during a year that most felt he wasn't used properly, and mainly faced opponents that in most cases hindered more than helped him out. It's one thing to have the ability to carry a guy like Dusty Rhodes or Nikita Koloff into a good match. It's quite another when you have to do it night-after-night without a break.

I went with Flair first mainly because this year was lacking in strong candidates. Akira Maeda had great impact in Japan, so I gave him the second place nod. Third was tougher, but I went with Yoshiaki Yatsu because it's quite an accomplishment being ranked No. 4 in the world as a pro wrestler, and winning your country's freestyle amateur championship in the same year.

I would have considered Randy Savage if I hadn't have seen him live in so many bad matches. He's been hot all year and when he wants to be, is as good as anyone. Ted DiBiase and Ricky Steamboat, while great workers, didn't seem to me to have the necessary push to be considered. Roddy Piper spent too much time off, and his recent role was a disappointment and I can't forget his role in Wrestlemania. As for Hulk Hogan, he deserves this award for all the impact he's had on the business, but the bottom line is, in my book, what's in the ring counts as well. I won't consider a bad wrestler under any circumstances.

MR. MIKE: As the business continues to constrict in top talent, so too does ability in the ring diminish in importance. The WWF is out-and-out sizzle, but no steak. Stiff, green, untalented, untrained, chemically bloated neanderthal muscleheads have cozed into the business like a seeping case of "Wrestler Simplex B."

How can anyone argue against Ric Flair? Technically, he's excellent. He's one of the best at making lessers look superior. He sets a pace others only shudder at. He's quick on the stick, a hardy party guy and the best possible front for the NWA. To his credit, he made an entire year of matches with Dusty Rhodes bearable--enough to destroy

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1980 - Harley Race
1981 - Ric Flair
1982 - Ric Flair
1983 - Ric Flair
1984 - Ric Flair
1985 - Ric Flair

a lesser man. His high level of consistency is his most impressive attribute. His willingness and encouragement of bizarre new twists to the classic screw-job ending makes him a pro's pro. But a wrestler of the year should be more--it should be a significant year for the person as well.

Because of that, I picked Maeda. He stands out in many ways. For the Japanese market, his ability, drawing power, psychology, showmanship are "over." His impact this year, and in the year to come on the business in Japan is far-reaching and significant. His "serious" perception by the Japanese audience makes him almost legit. He's forcing the issue of Inoki's control, the future direction and perhaps the very existence of New Japan Pro Wrestling.

From my standpoint, there's an intensity to his matches always there. I'd enjoy him more if he did some high spots and rope moves, but his stands against these tricks works in his favor. It's a serious knock against him that he doesn't display the versatility necessary to work well with Americans. To look at this dole-faced enigma, one wouldn't see much charisma. He doesn't have the physique, but he's a relentless technician and the serious nature of his style is refreshing after the inundation of American high gloss dross. For that, he gets my pick.

A few others come to mind. Buzz Sawyer's performance has been noteworthy, especially gratifying after a long spell of burn-out. He deserves the "Comeback of the Year" award.

Yoshiaki Yatsu was a standout all year. His side excursion to Olympic wrestling and performance therein erases all questions of whether wrestlers are athletes (at least some wrestlers). It's not easy to come up with others. Ricky Steamboat deserves credit for keeping up a work standard above call. Less so Randy Savage, who was matched with Professor George Steele so often he must be ready to do a three-way and get it all over with. Stan Hansen did as well as possible with bad opponents (Slaughter, Blackwell) in the U.S. and never got going. Barry Windham maintained high standards while on the fringes, but had no discernable impact. Even though Bruiser Brody seems to try and lose jobs quicker than he gets them, did have key roles in both Wrestlerock for the AWA, the World Class Texas Stadium card (both may be the last "high spots"

for these promotions) and headlined one of the biggest cards in Japan.

In the AWA (Anyone Who's Available), now more impotent than a French politician, nobody came close to having a year.

And who might be a favorite for 1987? Undoubtedly Flair will have another big year. Windham, with the right push, could do it. If the UWF succeeds nationally, then Terry Gordy and Steve Williams will get their share of publicity. Maeda might even be more important in 1987, along with Riki Choshu or Nobuhiko Takada. But I expect 1987 to be a poor year for the business, and that undermines evaluating any individual's "importance" to the business as a whole.

JEFF STEELE: Hulk Hogan has to be the man. When you say wrestling to a member of the general public, his name is the one that always is mentioned first. He comes into town and gets front-page headlines when no other wrestler even gets covered.

KURT BROWN: You rarely see anybody with the energy level of Flair, as well as the consistency level. His interviews are never lacking, nor are his bumps. I've never seen Tatsumi Fujinami in a poor match. He sells more believably than anyone I've ever seen and he uses a wide variety of great moves. Akira Maeda is also great. His match with Fujinami was one of the five best matches I've ever seen. I also enjoy his rebellious disposition. We need someone like him in the United States.

ROBERT STRAUSS: Taking everything into consideration, there can be no choice other than Flair. He does it all. However it's impossible to deny Hogan's importance to the business. He is pro wrestling to the average fan and his drawing power is phenomenal. The NWA could survive without Flair better than the WWF could without Hogan.

PAT HOED: While I think Flair is phenomenal, most of his moves and matches are predictable with no indication of a fresh approach. I've overdosed on his matches with Wide Load Rhodes. While I picked Terry Gordy, I'm salivating at the thought of Flair-Barry Windham matches in 1987.

RYAN CLARK: Watching Flair, I'm reminded of a line uttered in the movie "The Natural." It went like this: "Twenty years from now, when people see me walking down the street, I want them to point me out and say, 'There goes Roy Hobbs...the best there ever was.'" That's exactly what they'll be saying in 20 years about Flair. My only regret, as a fan, is that I have to continually watch Flair wrestle stiffly like Dusty Rhodes and Nikita Koloff during his prime. One can only imagine how secure

Flair's place in history would be if he wrestled the likes of Ted DiBiase, Tiger Mask, Tully Blanchard, or Barry Windham regularly.

KIM WOOD: Ric Flair is an expert in all aspects of the business. Puts on a consistently good, often great show. He handles the demands of his constant travel well, and he doesn't get hurt--at least he doesn't let it affect him if he does. Flair is THE professional in his field. Akira Maeda captures the imagination of his culture, and his matches transcend theatrics into reality. Hulk Hogan, basically a TV actor whose matches are basically personal appearances gets third--but give him credit. He plays his part well.

MOST OUTSTANDING WRESTLER

1. RIC FLAIR (126).....832
 2. Tatsumi Fujinami (79).....672
 3. Ted DiBiase (40).....421
 4. Nobuhiko Takada (24).....228
 5. Bobby Eaton (13).....220
- Honorable Mention: Ricky Steamboat 139, Yoshiaki Yatsu 121, Terry Gordy 120, Tiger Mask 108

This is the first year we've had this category. To me, this is the same as the ratings, just picking 1, 2 and 3. No. 3 was easy, Tatsumi Fujinami and a strong case could be made for him because in pure wrestling skill, he's better than either Flair or DiBiase. However the demands in Japan are quite different. The style is more serious and the fans more appreciative. To be able to wrestle well, and excite U.S. fans is a tougher proposition which is why I picked Flair and DiBiase as the top two. I've never seen a Flair match that the crowd isn't into. DiBiase might even be better, since he's more versatile, but Flair's ring psychology and performance energy gave him the top nod.

MR. MIKE: Flair, DiBiase, Fujinami, Tiger Mask and others all have great talent and also show it in the ring. Others, like Randy Savage and Chavo Guerrero have the talent, but don't, won't, or can't show it consistently. My pick for first is Takada. He impresses me the most, even though his headstrong attitude precludes usual high spots and much selling. He knows and uses excellent moves in every match. He's got a relentless intensity which makes the excitement build. The guy has great skills, a style that makes the most of them, and he shows it in almost every match.

JEFF STEELE: Flair has been misused, overused, and as I see more of his matches, they all start to look the same. My pick is Terry Gordy. I know he doesn't look like the best athlete in the business, but night-after-night he is awesome. I've had the privilege of watching Gordy since he's 14-years-old, and knew he'd be a World champion from the start.

DAVE KATZ: ~~D. DiBiase~~ can brawl, wrestle be great in tag matches and sell as well as anyone, even Flair. He plays a completely different role here than

in Japan, but is equally great.
JOE BECHT: Tatsumi Fujinami.
is so great he leaves me speechless.
KURT BROWN: The U.S. needs some
Crush Girls.

GRANT ZWARYCH: Ted DiBiase's
matches seem to have more variety
than Flair's. It may be because
he's got a lot better opponents.

BEST BABYFACE

1. HULK HOGAN (241).....1,299
 2. Jim Duggan (6).....316
 3. Riki Choshu (9).....267
 4. Ricky Morton (10).....220
 5. Road Warriors (1).....147
- Honorable Mention: Roddy Piper
109, Dusty Rhodes 106, Jerry
Lawler 85, Magnum T.A. 84,
Chigusa Nagayo 75

Previous winners

- 1980 - Dusty Rhodes
1981 - Tommy Rich
1982 - Hulk Hogan
1983 - Hulk Hogan
1984 - Hulk Hogan
1985 - Hulk Hogan

Ever heard of an open-and-shut
case? When it comes to heat
and drawing power, which is what
this is all about, whomever is
in second place behind Hulk Hogan
is a very distant second. When it
comes to drawing power, the Road
Warriors come next, but for heat,
they don't do anything to get
sympathy.

Ricky Morton is outstanding here,
super popular and seems to have
a large legion of fans. Riki
Choshu is another one as far as
perfect ring psychology for a
babyface, good drawing power
and popularity. However my pick
for second was Chigusa Nagayo,
the classic babyface (although
my reaction may be because her
foe, Dump Matsumoto, is an all-
time great heel) with drawing
power and gets super heat. She's
a tremendous worker, which helps
as well. For pure interviews as
a babyface, none is better than
Jerry Lawler. He's the type of
a guy who you can watch and like
for an intelligent aspect--
difficult when watching the Road
Warriors wrestle--or watching
exactly who cheers for Morton.
Still, I picked Morton third.

MR. MIKE: The criteria of
drawing power, heat and popularity
makes it an obvious runaway.
Hulk Hogan's almost mystical
attraction is a textbook market-
ing case that defies analysis.
As long as they reach non-fans,
Hogan will continue as the top
draw. But like a chain-letter
pyramid, they're gonna run out of
marks eventually. What if the
only wrestlers left were like the
Hulk? Time to check out Jai Lai.

Nobody in wrestling gets a
better babyface push than Dusty
Rhodes. This self-aggrandizing
sloth practically raises himself
to godhood, yet gets more negative

heat than 10 people pushed the way
he is should. No way will he be
considered, a man whose success and
popularity is a 3-D self-fantasy
done with mirrors and mind-gas.

The appeal of the Rock'n'Roll
Express largely escapes me. The
abuse these pre-pubescent heartthrobs
take on their arms and legs so the
teeny screamers hope the other hangin'
stuff stays okay is something. But
their drawing power is real, and it
should be stale by now, but isn't.

In Japan, Choshu is certainly a
draw. On TV, Nagayo looks impressive.

Jim Duggan was the best draw
the UWF had, although I liked DiBiase
and Williams. Steamboat is the best
bet for No. 2 in WWF. Nobody else
is really close. AWA? While the
Midnight Rockers did much better than
expected and were good enough to
live down their embarrassing name,
how can they be considered when every
building is an empty barn? Jerry
Lawler at least kept Memphis alive,
but that only matters if you live
there. He's kind of an inoffensive
Dusty Rhodes, but at least he doesn't
fool himself. Really, after Hogan,
Choshu and Nagayo, everyone else is
down on the list.

KURT BROWN: When one wrestler
headlines almost every big-money
gate, who else can be close? Hogan
is a household name, and the biggest
name since Gorgeous George.

VIC SHENBERG: For some reason
people love Hogan. I had no idea
there were that many mentally ill
people around.

JOE BECHT: Did you realize Hogan
was voted the third most idolized
man in America by teenage males?

JEFF BOWDREN: The only person
who gets anywhere near the reaction
that Hogan gets is Chigusa Nagayo.

RYAN CLARK: Without Hogan, McMahon
could be dead in the water. With
all the high-priced talent he's
brought in, that's a pretty sad
commentary.

GARY ZIMAK: Can you imagine how
popular Hogan would be if he was
really an athlete? The best thing I
can say about Dusty Rhodes is he's
an egotistical fat slob with no
athletic ability, but he is over big
with the fans.

BEST HEEL

1. MICHAEL P.S. HAYES (96).....711
 2. Ric Flair (54).....492
 3. Dump Matsumoto (63).....424
 4. Bill Dundee (25).....267
 5. Paul Orndorff (19).....265
- Honorable Mention: Randy Savage 168,
Col. DeBeers 121, Larry Zbyszko 102

Previous winners

- 1980 - Larry Zbyszko
1981 - Don Muraco
1982 - Buzz Sawyer
1983 - Michael Hayes
1984 - Roddy Piper
1985 - Roddy Piper

This can be a difficult category because nowadays, when a heel gets so good fans start to realize it, they start cheering. But there is nobody better in what being a heel is all about than Dump Matsumoto. Her impact, based purely on appearance is super enough. What she does in the ring makes it even better. It's amazing that someone who doesn't do interviews can come across that good, but she does. She's the best there is. Second goes to Michael Hayes. He personifies a young punk with no redeeming social value. Most importantly, he does the best heel interviews around. Third I went with Ric Flair, even though he gets cheered so much. His talent is that he can often-times take a crowd that cheers for him, and through ring psychology, turn himself into a heel by the midpoint of the match. Believe me, the fact he's able to get himself over as a heel probably takes more psychology than anything else most of the others even do. As for others, Nikita Koloff is a tremendous heel just standing there. I considered him behind Flair. Bill Dundee was tremendously entertaining, but when Jerry Lawler wasn't around and he headlined Memphis, crowds weren't so hot. When he was against Lawler, he's a contender. The best WWF one I've seen is Savage, because I've simply been unable to dislike Roberts. Ole Anderson is a great role heel, but can't carry a circuit like the ones above him. Larry Zbyszko is dismissed because he couldn't draw, and Col. DeBeers forgotten because every time I saw him live, he got nothing resembling heat. For a guy with no physical charisma or color, Tully Blanchard isn't bad. Paul Orndorff drew some hot crowds, but it was mainly Hogan drawing the crowd, and his role is so cartoonish you can't take him seriously.

MR. MIKE: Orndorff should be considered, as his arrogance and physique are standouts, but to me, he's stale. The whole "turn" was clumsy and obvious. There's no drawing power here in the AWA so nobody can be considered. Ric Flair is an obvious top three pick, although his being a heel is largely to placate Rhodes' ego and he's too popular by a strict definition of a heel. Nikita Koloff was a natural, able to get both heat and draw fans. Matsumoto makes a great impact on TV. I'm bored to death by the Freebirds, Abdullah the Butcher or anyone with Scandor Akbar. I wish I could consider Zbyszko. He gets good heat live from the especially mindless fans--but drawing power? And his matches suck, too. Top three are Koloff, Matsumoto and Orndorff.

DAVE KATZ: Ric Flair is the best. He's consistently one of the most hated and one of the most popular men in the business.

JEFF STEELE: I believe in order to be a top heel, you have to be able to keep the people from cheering for you. Flair and Jake Roberts can't do that. Neither of them are heels. They are simply strong personalities who wrestle babyfaces. People don't hate either of them. I thought Ted DiBiase was a great heel. But the best one is Michael Hayes. The people really hate him, which is really something because the people all really want to like him.

GARY ZIMAK: Hayes is the best. He just exudes nastiness. His interviews are the best of all the heels and he seems like the type of person that you wouldn't like to meet. Plays his "role" (?) effectively.

JOHN JANCE: Matsumoto's impact, both visually and stylistically, can't be denied. In an era when too many heels are cartoon villains, she is the perfect throwback to the good old days" when villains were feared monsters.

JEFF BOWDREN: The only thing you can hate Flair for is for being overexposed. Hayes has been head-and-shoulders above everyone else.

STEVE GERBER: Total absolute evil-personified--that's Dump Matsumoto. She can wrestle or brawl and terrifies the fans, the announcers and everyone else.

BOB CLOSSON: The best heel is the one you want to come out and see get destroyed. In that regard, the best one was Bill Dundee in Memphis when he was feuding with Jerry Lawler. He can take over a TV show like nobody else and he's fun to watch.

FEUD OF THE YEAR

1. HOGAN -vs- ORNDORFF (78).....603
2. Midnight -vs- RocknRoll (66)..592
3. Lawler -vs- Dundee (48).....403
4. Steamboat -vs- Roberts (12)...150
5. Choshu -vs- Tsuruta (24).....147

Honorable Mention: Freebirds vs. DiBiase & Williams 138, Fujinami vs. Maeda 117, Fantastics vs. Shepherders 106, Takada vs. Koshinaka 102, Magnum vs. Koloff 82, Rockers vs. Rose & Somers 82

When you compare the top two here, it's like comparing apples and oranges. Hogan-Orndorff was a super draw, transparent, yet effective. Most importantly, it took WWF out of its post-Wrestlemania slump, and for that reason alone, I have to rate it No. 1. I admit the seven bouts between the two I've seen, five of them were real bad and the other two were just tolerable.

Rock'n'Roll vs. Midnight had super matches--probably the best pure work in the U.S. this year. The heat was pretty good, but it was more part of a package than a feud which anchored the card. Choshu-Yatsu vs. Tsuruta-Tenryu may have been even better inside the ring and the heat was exceptional. But my pick for second place was Lawler vs. Dundee. Everything about it and everyone involved in it did a great job of

getting it over. Another important point was it had a climactic match, and ended decisively. Just as it began from a climactic match at the end of the year, and spent 10 weeks being heated up while Lawler was gone. No. 3 was Chigusa Nagayo vs. Dump Matsumoto, the epitome of good vs. evil--great heat, both great draws, and great matches. When girls can draw a \$175,000 gate, you know something is being done right.

MR. MIKE: Obviously Hogan-Orndorff has to be considered. They've had good matches by Hogan's standards. Even okay by any standards. The gates were beyond comprehension. Piper vs. Adonis was terrible in every way. Midnight vs. Rock'n'Roll seems like it's in its 30th year, but it still should be considered. The feud itself wasn't that hot, but the matches were. I can't consider New Japan vs. the UWF guys. It can't hold a candle to the old Ishingun vs. Seikigun feud. They had to avoid the whole focal point--Inoki vs. Maeda--for the entire year. How about Vince McMahon vs. Danny Davis?
1) Choshu-Yatsu vs. Tsuruta-Tenryu;
2) Midnight vs. Rock'n'Roll; 3) Hogan vs. Orndorff

Previous winners

- 1980 - Bruno Sammartino vs. Larry Zbyszko
- 1981 - Andre the Giant vs. Killer Khan
- 1982 - Ted DiBiase vs. Junkyard Dog
- 1983 - Freebirds vs. Von Erichs
- 1984 - Freebirds vs. Von Erichs
- 1985 - Ted DiBiase vs. Jim Duggan

STEVE GERBER: Jake Roberts and Rick Steamboat made it look like they would kill each other if the other wrestlers didn't intervene.

ROBERT STRAUSS: The name of the game is money. Hogan vs. Orndorff has to be the winner.

LARRY LOVELL: Lawler vs. Dundee was the only real solid feud I could think of.

MICHAEL GENDELMAN: The key is bringing out the best in each other which is why I picked Midnight vs. Rock'n'Roll Express.

DAVE KATZ: Rock'n'Roll vs Midnight had the most consistent great matches in the United States.

JOE BECHT: The wrestling wasn't the best in the Magnum T.A. vs. Nikita Koloff feud, but the idea of having a best-of-seven series for a title was appealing.

VIC SHENBERG: Nothing compared to Choshu-Yatsu vs. Tsuruta-Tenryu matches.

JOHN JANCE: The matches may have sucked, but the turning of Orndorff was handled well and the gates made it the biggest grossing, in more ways than one, feud in years.

JEFF BOWDREN: From a gate standpoint, nothing could compare to Hogan and Orndorff. But the

matches weren't good enough to be a winner. On the opposite end of the Spectrum, Midnight Rockers vs. Rose & Somers had some damn good matches, especially by AWA standards, but didn't draw flies. Actually the best WWF feud was Steamboat vs. Roberts, although it didn't draw well, either. In terms of crowd size, response, reaction, realism and quality of matches, nothing came close to Fujinami vs. Maeda. They have matches that make you jump out of your seat.

TAG TEAM OF THE YEAR

- 1. MIDNIGHT EXPRESS (172).....1,068
 - 2. Choshu-Yatsu (24).....544
 - 3. Rock'n'Roll (30).....408
 - 4. Road Warriors (27).....345
 - 5. British Bulldogs (19).....198
- Honorable Mention: Freebirds 130, Midnight Rockers 129, DiBiase & Williams 109, Fantastics 88

Previous winners

- 1980 - Freebirds
- 1981 - Terry Gordy & Jimmy Snuka
- 1982 - Stan Hansen & Ole Anderson
- 1983 - Ricky Steamboat & Jay Youngblood
- 1984 - Road Warriors
- 1985 - Dynamite Kid & Davey Boy Smith

Even though I picked the British Bulldogs last year, I stated as the year closed, the best team in wrestling is the Midnight Express, and that they'd be favorites to win it this year. For once, a prediction was on the money. Midnight has been the best team in wrestling for most of the year. In my book, their only challengers for supremacy are Choshu & Yatsu. In fact, if you take charisma into account, Choshu & Yatsu, with the combined ability/charisma package, should be on top. In narrowing it down to Midnight, I gave them the nod simply because both guys sell better, even though Choshu & Yatsu are better on offense. Very close call, however. Third place is tougher. The Road Warriors, for importance, are still No. 1, although that margin is falling to the Rock'n'Roll Express (which will never overtake them simply because wrestling's strongest demographic group--men 18 to 49--love the Roadies and are jealous of the female attention given the two little guys). In my book, the most underpublicized but steadily first-rate team around is Tsuruta & Tenryu--I've had them in the top five all year long. Fujinami & Kimura and Midnight Rockers are both very good, but neither is top three in my book. The Bulldogs were, before injuries and WWF, but not this year. DiBiase & Williams and DiBiase & Hansen didn't team up regularly enough for my consideration. Three other teams I considered, but didn't see enough of were Tatum & Victory, Viet Cong Express and Owen Hart & Ben Bassarab. The best team at the Crockett Cup was The Fantastics, two guys who consistently work their butts off. My third pick was between Roadies (eliminated because their matches are too one-sided and don't flow), Fantastics (something about

them doesn't qualify), and Tsuruta-Tenryu and Rock'n'Roll--I eventually went with Tsuruta-Tenryu because they were in the best bouts of the Year, and it takes two to tango. A favorite for next year, if they team up consistently, is Takada & Koshinaka, the best team in Japan during tournament season.

MR. MIKE: It's kind of hard to separate the two Expresses. Midnight seems much better, but part of that is because the Rock'n'Roll are such great foes. I see Robert Gibson as more of a weak link than Dennis Condrey, plus Midnight has Jim Cornette. The Freebirds really didn't do much as a team this year. The Fantastics are real good, but limited in their ability to be taken seriously because of size. The two Japanese teams (Choshu-Yatsu, Tsuruta-Tenryu) are excellent, especially against each other. It's also interesting to see them against the Road Warriors, as their superiority in ability and workrate becomes obvious. But the Road Warriors are good enough for third, and for their size are good in the ring. I picked Midnight first over Choshu-Yatsu for year-long consistency.

PAT HOED: I picked Choshu & Yatsu. They have incredible timing that is rarely seen in the U.S. My favorite move is when Choshu whips the opponent into the ropes, tags Yatsu, who comes off with an awesome dropkick before the foe is even a foot off the ropes.

JEFF BOWDREN: The only battle is for second place. Midnight has been fantastic all year and nobody else has been close. Rose-Somers and the Rockers have been fun to watch and had good matches. The Rockers get third in my book and should give half the credit to Rose and Somers. There are a number of great teams in Japan, but Choshu & Yatsu stand out, so I picked them second.

GARY ZIMAK: Midnight Express is the best tag team in wrestling. In the ring they are consistently outstanding. Outside the ring, Jim Cornette is a genius. I couldn't even consider another team for the top spot. Road Warriors are strong No.2, because of their impact on the business. Their work has improved as well. I like the concept of the team, and their invincible image really turns on the fans.

JEFF STEELE: The Midnight Express is the best, but I'm afraid without Cornette, they'd be nowhere. I picked Rock'n' Roll second. I can't stand them, but they are a great team. Midnight Rockers single-handedly saved the AWA. The kind of matches they had with Rose & Somers are what got me interested in wrestling in the first place.

MOST IMPROVED WRESTLER

1. RICK STEINER (78).....573
2. John Tatum (39).....400
3. Sting (27).....237

4. Jack Victory (12).....196
 5. Shawn Michaels (7).....186
- Honorable Mention: Sam Houston 118,
Steve Williams 99, Keiji Muto 87,
Buddy Roberts 84

Previous winners

- 1980 - Larry Zbyszko
1981 - Adrian Adonis
1982 - Jim Duggan
1983 - Curt Hennig
1984 - The Cobra
1985 - Steve "Dr. Death" Williams

This is a pretty difficult category because you have to differentiate between guys getting their first major push, and guys who have improved in the ring. There is no doubt about my no. 1 pick--Sting. In January--and even in May--he was one of the worst wrestlers I had ever seen. I thought he was the epitome of the musclehead stiff type that was polluting the business. What happens? The guys goes and drops about 30 pounds, removes the chemical additives from his system, and improves into being a wrestler who threatens to be very good. If he improves one-third as much over the next six months, he's destined to be a superstar. Second place goes to his partner, Steiner. I saw his first pro match and thought he was going to be a major star, but for the next year seemed lost in the ring and headed nowhere. All those months of working nightly with Chavo Guerrero have paid off, because he will be one of the superstars of this business before 1987 is over. Third place is tougher--there's Tatum--a nobody who turned into a pretty good wrestler, but now is a question mark; Buddy Roberts, more of a comeback story than an improvement; Steve Williams--already quite good, now one of the most awesome forces around; and Shiro Koshinaka, my third pick. Koshinaka was a green, but fairly good wrestler lacking in confidence and completely out of his league with Takada in the spring. Now he's confident and a top-20 wrestler who can stay with Takada--which is something very few can do.

MR. MIKE: Most guys to me are the ones who have improved from awful to fair. There aren't as many who have gone from good to great and I think there is less incentive for wrestlers to improve nowadays anyway. Correlation between effort/skill and getting a push often doesn't even exist in this country. I can't consider rookies. They all should improve. It's just that some do more than others. Sam Houston is getting a big push, rather than actually improving. He was already good last year. If anything, now he's just more confident.

My top three are Steiner, Victory and Michaels. Tatum has improved a lot, partly due to better opponents. Steiner has really come into his own and is very impressive. Michaels has good savvy for his short time in.

JEFF BOWDREN: You might as well simply ask, who has improved the most in the UWF, because that's where all

the wrestlers who are improving come from. John Tatum's TV match with Terry Taylor was one of the best matches of the year, which shows he's improved a tremendous amount. Victory now has some of the best matches on UWF live cards, which says a lot. Keiji Muto, Michaels and Steiner are also considered, and all things considered, Sting has made remarkable progress. Top three are Victory, Muto and Michaels.

PAT HOED: In my opinion, Sting can already work a match as well, or sometimes better than either one of the Road Warriors. He really gets some air on some of those flying fists and kneedrops.

GARY ZIMAK: Recalling Steiner's early matches as an AWA jobber makes it extremely hard to accept he's the same wrestler he was then. If he keeps up at this rate, he'll be one of the biggest names in another year. His belly-to-belly suplex is incredible. To me, Steiner's most outstanding quality is his flexibility. For a man of his thick, muscular stature and size, he is nowhere near as stiff as one would expect.

JOE BECHT: My picks are Tatum, Victory and Roberts. Isn't it amazing how good wrestlers get when they leave the Von Erich promotion?

JEFF STEELE: In my judgement, nobody has improved more than Sting. I think he's not being used right, but you can't take away from the fact that in one year, he's gone from being the single most useless guy in wrestling, to a very decent worker who gets noticeably better each week. John Tatum is a completely new person in the UWF. Kendall Windham has improved a lot as well.

JOE LANCELO: Tatum must have improved a lot. I spent a lot more time watching him than Missy as the year went on.

JESSE REYES: It seems after he and Scott Hall lost their tag belts, that Curt Hennig has become a much better wrestler.

BOB CLOSSON: Paul Diamond used to be a bore, but has turned out to be a very good wrestler.

MOST UN-IMPROVED

1. BOB ORTON (31).....199
 2. Kevin Von Erich (24).....192
 3. Paul Orndorff (18).....181
 4. Roddy Piper (15).....157
 5. Dynamite Kid (22).....154
- Honorable Mention: Dick Slater 106, Don Muraco 100, Adrian Adonis 85, Junkyard Dog 82, Davey Boy Smith 78

A tough and sometimes cruel category. The easiest thing to do here is look at last year's ratings, and what guys at the top don't belong there anymore. The names pop at you--Dynamite Kid (it's hard to pick him because of all the injuries he's had), Stan Hansen (but he isn't that bad), Bruiser Brody (poor opponents, poor circumstances but like Hansen, he is still highly regarded), Chris

Adams (working most of the year for the von Erichs with no decent opponents does wonders for things like work rate), Butch Reed, Paul Orndorff, Roddy Piper, Dick Slater and Bob Orton top the list. Orndorff also has the injury excuse, but even before that, had turned into a pretty lousy wrestler. He gets my third place vote. Piper gets second, and to make it a clean sweep, Orton gets first.

MR. MIKE: Lots of guys have stopped working to a varying degree. Some who stopped to a great degree were Orton and Piper. Poor Krusher Khrushchev has never gotten back in gear after his broken leg, but it's not fair to pick on him. I've got to admit that my hero, Bruiser Brody, is way off peak form. The few times he was in with a good opponent and had a chance for a hot match, well, he was still good, but you know what I mean. Davey Boy Smith has been largely forgettable, but he hasn't been bad or anything. I picked Piper, because I doubt he could work a good 10 minute match anymore.

JEFF BOWDREN: Kevin Von Erich's work-rate has plummeted at an unbelievable rate. If you could name a tag team, it would be The Fabulous Ones. Stan puts together a good match only on rare occasions. Steve is totally disinterested and together, act like they don't give a shit. Leroy Brown is a guy who was never worth a damn, but now he just shows up to collect a paycheck. If ever a guy looked out of place in a promotion, it's Leroy in the UWF.

PAT HOED: Slater had great matches against Butch Reed and Jake Roberts early in the year. But once he joined WWF, it was over. Nikita Koloff continues to be a muscle-bound freak with no ability.

JOHN JANCE: Tony Atlas has been awful for years, but the decline lately is noticeable. It kills me to put one of my favorites, Stan Hansen, second. He's at least still interesting to watch.

GARY ZIMAK: Dick Murdoch has done a complete about-face with Crockett. I've really been shocked to see how bad some of his matches have been. I can't believe it's the same guy who carried Inoki through a great 30 minute match during the summer. Anyone who has bad matches with Flair must be doing something wrong. Orndorff is sickening to watch. With the exception of his bouts with Hogan, he doesn't even try anymore. Orton has gone down the same road. It's difficult to watch his matches now and he used to be one of the best.

KURT BROWN: I hate picking Davey Boy Smith. At one time, he and Dynamite Kid were the greatest thing in wrestling. Now he's dull. I just hope he heads back to Japan.

RYAN CLARK: It's sad to see what's happened to Dynamite Kid. 1984 seems like a lifetime ago to

us Dynamite Kid fans. But my first pick is Jerry Blackwell. It's inhumane to let this guy wrestle. I actually get scared watching he or Andre wrestle because it looks like they could die at anytime.

JOE LANCELLO: Blackwell's health is an excuse. Muraco's gut is his excuse. Orton doesn't seem to have an excuse, that's why he wins.

MICHAEL GENDELMAN: Larry Zbyszko and the fast-forward button on your VCR go hand-in-hand.

STEVE MUNARI: Orndorff is a guy I used to think was pretty good. Now I can't even stand watching him. His lack of enthusiasm transfers into his work. Second would be Hogan. I never felt he was anything more than a below average big guy, but he did have some good matches in the AWA and Japan. I can't recall a wrestler so publicized who was so overrated and boring.

ROBERT STRAUSS: First Piper had the worst match of the year. Then he became an ineffective, non-selling babyface. Last year he was my favorite wrestler. I know Dynamite Kid has played hurt, but there's no denying his in-ring performance is a lot less spectacular. He certainly would be a candidate for most heart. Junkyard Dog has always been bad, but this year he's totally an embarrassment.

Previous winners

1984 - Jimmy Snuka

1985 - Sgt. Slaughter

MOST OBNOXIOUS PERSONALITY

1. VINCE MCMAHON (93).....678

2. Gorilla Monsoon (42).....488

3. David Crockett (31).....324

4. Larry Nelson (33).....250

5. Hulk Hogan (15).....187

Honorable Mention: Gene Okerlund

165, Dusty Rhodes 112

Previous winners

1981 - Gene LeBelle ("Whoa!")

1982 - David Crockett ("Look at Dusty")

1983 - Vince McMahon, Jr ("What a great man Bob Backlund is")

1984 - Vince McMahon, Jr ("Get down with the Dog!")

1985 - Vince McMahon, Jr (remember the wrestling video?)

I hate picking here, because I'm picking how people come across on TV. It's easy to hate Gorilla Monsoon, and I turn the TV off whenever I hear or see Hulk Hogan. Dozens of others come to mind, but one guy I simply can't stand is Freddy Miller. When I saw him on Continental Wrestling, I can't describe how my stomach reacted.

MR. MIKE: With all due respect to that master of obnoxious arrogance, I'm going with good ol' boy Davey Crockett. He's an announcer only a brother could love, for he has no redeeming qualities. His smirking goads to the heels would embarrass anyone who ever looked up professionalism in the dictionary. I thrill for his panicked shrill, "Tony, We Gotta Go" as

the end show credits roll--just as they turn up the heat. If only he'd go, at the open of the show.

I won't leave out everyone's favorite primate prick. Gorilla Marella's authority on every subject at hand is amazing. But his best talent is coming up with a stupid phrase, then overusing it past the point of nausea ("attitude adjustment," "capacity crowd," "mecca"). How clever and witty. The problem is, now that he's with Bobby Heenan, I'm enjoying the Gorilla. Heenan is making interplay with the baboon funny.

Gene Okerlund always merits sincere consideration, since his great strength is he thinks he's as incredibly funny as he actually isn't. It's almost painful watching the jerk joke his way through his material. He's nowhere near good enough to parody what is already a parody. His humor is tasteless and offensive, and it doesn't work because he confuses it with clever wit. Credit Titan for scaling back on his excretorious exposure.

I want to add one wrestler, who beats out Gene for third. It's that fabled son of a plumber's helper, Dusty "I'm What's Happening, Aren't I?" Rhodes. His status as a main eventer is filled with merit and spontaneity. Since he's a great booker, you've got to take this ponderous worm as a wrestler like a faustian bargain. I like his subtle touches the best. Like his orchestrated TV entrances, big build up, the blob comes out, camera tracks him like it's looking at Buddha, follows him, never wavering in its focus of his scars and flab. The very failure of evolution. Even in a tag match, the camera is always glued to his rolling lard, even staying on his ample rear end rather than giving a shot of his partner, opponent, the crowd, or at least going to a commercial.

STEVE MUNARI: I actually wince when David Crockett speaks. Here is a guy who has been close to wrestling his entire life and been an announcer for a long time, but he's just terrible. I understand all announcers have to be somewhat biased toward the babyfaces, but he goes too far. His erratic, nonsensical style drives me up the wall everyone.

Gordon Solie also busts my stones. He actually acts like he believes everything said about him. He thinks he's intelligently describing wrestling, but in reality he just overuses the most cliched phrases.

I hate not to put Bill Mercer higher, because he's totally incompetent.

JEFF BOWDREN: Everytime I hear Hulk Hogan tell the little kiddies to take their vitamins, pump iron and say their prayers "just like me" I get nauseous.

ROBERT STRAUSS: I've picked Larry Nelson, David Crockett and Vince McMahon but there are so many possibilities the mind boggles. What these three share is a totally condescending manner toward me as a fan.

KIM WOOD: Vince Jr. outdistances the field and also dresses well.

RYAN CLARK: I remember going to a comedy club in San Jose where the comic was referred to as the "mentally retarded son of the owner." David Crockett, with his ridiculous commentary, grating voice and rude behavior reminded me of him. Like the comic, if he wasn't related, he wouldn't be qualified to be working.

GARY ZIMAK: Hogan basically makes me sick. Do you think anyone could be more annoying on interviews? Could he possibly scream a little louder? Could he possibly flex for a longer amount of time? I think what bugs me the most is his popularity. They obviously can't be watching his matches very close. Do you have any idea how much I would give to see someone like Harley Race destroy him.

Larry Nelson isn't as annoying as Hogan, but he's in a class by himself. Some of his faces are disgusting.

BEST ON INTERVIEWS

1. JIM CORNETTE (120).....856
 2. Ric Flair (64).....607
 3. Michael P.S. Hayes (19).....307
 4. Roddy Piper (18).....190
 5. Bill Dundee (13).....180
- Honorable Mention: Jim Duggan 103,
Jimmy Garvin 75

Previous winners

- 1981 - Lou Albano and Roddy Piper (tie)
1982 - Roddy Piper
1983 - Roddy Piper
1984 - Jimmy Hart
1985 - Jim Cornette

Lots of good candidates here, since nowadays ability on interviews in many ways is important than ability in the ring. Although everyone that works for Crockett suffers from overexposure, they also have some of the best guys in this regard from Cornette, my top pick, to Flair, Jim Garvin, Dundee, Arn and Ole Anderson and even Dusty Rhodes when he's making sense. Bill Watts himself was excellent, and Jim Duggan can be, but was far too repetitious for most of the year. Most of the Titan guys are decent--they sure get enough practice time, but they seem too fried to do much but wallow in their own self-importance. Piper can be good, and Heenan can be excellent, but I'm bored with both. I still enjoy Larry Zbyszko and Nick Bockwinkel on the AWA, and Michael Hayes is excellent at being a sinister heel in the UWF. I'll go with Watts second, and if I have to pick a third, I'll go with Flair by a slight margin over the Memphis version of Dundee and perennial interview great Jerry Lawler.

MR. MIKE: Ric Flair is great, as is Cornette. But the proliferation of their weekly speil almost

reduces greatness to tedium. To lesser degrees, Garvin, Savage and Ole Anderson are very good. Dundee and Heenan are near-misses. In the case of Dundee, I saw too little. In the case of Heenan, I saw too much. Hayes' ability is unquestioned, but nothing memorable besides some smart-ass remarks about Missy Hyatt. Flair is my No. 1. My No. 2 is clearly Zbyszko, who's been a killer with his pointed barbs in all directions. Cornette is No. 3.

ROBERT STRAUSS: Cornette cemented his position for all-time when he said that Baby Doll bought her clothes in the Junior Moose Department.

RYAN CLARK: Cornette may be the best, but I find myself repeating Flair's lines more often.

DAVE KATZ: Jim Garvin is always in a good upbeat mood, uses new material and is never stale. I still love the line, "It's not my fault."

GARY ZIMAK: When considering just interviews, Cornette is a true classic. He delivery and end lines are tremendous. He probably makes me laugh more than any other wrestling personality. Unfortunately, with all his exposure, it'll be difficult for him to keep this up for another year. Hayes is a fantastic "smart-ass." I always stop what I'm doing when he starts talking. I love his references to other sports. His best line, in reference to Steve Williams returning, was saying "Steve Carlton's own team let him go to the dogs."

KURT BROWN: Cornette is great because he's every bit as much fun to listen to for the smart fans as he is obnoxious for the marks. He's got a clever stamp of individuality on his interviews. I've enjoyed him since the beginning of his career in Memphis. The most memorable thing was a few years back in Dallas when The Fantastics requested their friend "Little John," sit at ringside next to Cornette. You could see this skit coming from a mile away. Somehow Cornette made it fresh and amusing, chuckling and asking, "Where is the wee man?"

JOE BECHT: I don't care what anybody says, the Iron Sheik blows everyone else away. His accent and saying things like "Gene Mean" and "Look at our body" break me up. He's great when talking Iranian and his face is perfect. I went to college in Iowa and every week he would challenge Dan Gable. It was phenomenal.

JEFF BOWDREN: Cornette has been hysterical in spots this year. The best ones were his workout before the Bash, and the scaffold workout ("Bobby, would you quit whining."). Flair is starting to get overexposed, but when seen on a steady, but not monotonous basis, he's the best in the business. Actually his best skit was seen by very few, it was in the Sundome in Tampa and he found Lex Luger in "his" dressing room. It was

Flair at his best. Jim Garvin has to be given credit. He had a feud built up with Wahoo McDaniel before Wahoo ever even showed up. Watts' interview where he was packing his car for a trip to New Orleans ("Give me a baseball bat made out of American pine") was great.

MOST CHARISMATIC

1. HULK HOGAN (214).....1,333
 2. Road Warriors (6).....327
 3. Riki Choshu (27).....318
 4. Roddy Piper (13).....204
 5. Ric Flair (10).....174
- Honorable Mention: Dusty Rhodes
102, Ricky Morton 81, Michael Hayes 81

Previous Winners

- 1980 - Ric Flair
1981 - Michael Hayes
1982 - Dusty Rhodes (tie)
Ric Flair
1983 - Ric Flair
1984 - Ric Flair
1985 - Hulk Hogan

In looking for someone who gets a big reaction without doing much, the only thought process goes into second and third. Hogan is a solid No. 1, and to me, equally solid are the Road Warriors at No. 2. The most charismatic heels are Hayes, Flair (tho he works very hard at it), Savage (although Elizabeth has a lot to do with it) and Dump Matsumoto. Others I considered were Ricky Morton and Riki Choshu, but my easy No. 3 pick is a totally useless guy, who if I had a circuit, would put over in a second--Nikita Koloff. It's those eyes and those traps.

MR. MIKE: Hogan is the easy, obvious and inescapable No. 1. We're looking for guys who get a big reaction without doing much. Guys like the Rock'n'Roll Express, Choshu and Flair have great natural charisma, but also work very hard on their matches, interviews and image. Others, like Kerry Von Erich, Jerry Lawler, Paul Orndorff, Roddy Piper, Barry Windham, Dusty Rhodes and Akira Maeda have charismatic appeal to differing degrees. Nikita Koloff, Road Warriors and Lex Luger have great physical charisma. The Roadies appeal is too strong, and now, too long standing, to ignore. They go second, with Koloff third.

GARY ZIMAK: Hogan is the most charismatic man in sports today. He does virtually nothing except point and pose, yet is incredibly popular. He's got so much charisma it doesn't concern fans that he can't wrestle to save his life. The Road Warriors are great for a reaction by just walking into an arena. The image that has been built up for these guys is very effective. The vast majority of fans truly feel they are invincible. Marton-Gibson get third, as whenever I see them in action, the fans go crazy when they enter the ring. I'd have thought they would have gotten bored with them

by now, but their reaction seems to be as strong as ever.

JOHN JANCE: The impact and manipulative ability Hogan has on a crowd, even though it's all contrived, says a lot. But his appearances in the real world, like on the Joan Rivers Show, leave a lot to be desired. Rhodes is similar, but appeals to a trashier fan. Road Warriors aren't as pathetic as the first two, but their ring performances still doesn't warrant the response they get.

JEFF BOWDREN: If this doesn't describe Hogan, nothing does. A total zero in the ring, but once he flexes his muscles, the people go bananas. Hayes gets a big response through his hip gyrations and his borderline obscene moves. Luger can rip a T-shirt and people go wild. He's like Hulk, except without the same effect at the box office. Koloff does nothing in the ring, but looks great just standing there. I picked him third, behind Mr. Charisma in Japan, Riki Choshu. Of all the guys I've mentioned, he's by far the best worker. But the fans really get into him.

BEST TECHNICAL WRESTLER

1. TATSUMI FUJINAMI (118).....879
 2. Yoshiaki Yatsu (96).....579
 3. Ted DiBiase (49).....406
 4. Nobuhiko Takada (12).....394
 5. Ric Flair (25).....237
- Honorable Mention: Chavo Guerrero 178, Ricky Steamboat 145, Akira Maeda 123, Dynamite Kid 105, Bobby Eaton 75

Previous winners

- 1980 - Bob Backlund
1981 - Ted DiBiase
1982 - Satoru Sayama
1983 - Satoru Sayama
1984 - Dynamite Kid (tie)
Masa Saito
1985 - Tatsumi Fujinami

This is one category that American wrestlers aren't even considered in. There are a dozen Japanese who do moves, counters and throws quickly and with perfect execution, that outshine any of the U.S. wrestlers. Trying to pick among them is a difficult task. Fujinami, Yatsu and Takada are all excellent and without peer. Ditto Fujiwara in a completely different way. And if you throw in the flying moves, you've got to consider Tiger Mask. But my top three (Fujinami, Takada and Yatsu) are almost interchangeable, but I went with them in that order.

MR. MIKE: Being pragmatic, you can't really consider Americans. Flair's a prime example. How much technical wrestling does he show in endless mind numbing encounters with Rhodes, Koloff and Luger? Chavo Guerrero has great moves, but his role as a glorified preliminary wrestler limits him. They are capable, as are DiBiase, Steamboat, Sawyer, Dynamite Kid and Martel. Japanese wrestling is a combination of variety of moves and excitement,

rather than steroid brawling and gimmicks. Their wrestling is a craft, to be learned, practiced, with exciting moves and skill as the ultimate goal. This year, the product differentiation has been even more apparent.

The best ones I saw are the top Japanese wrestlers, which at least there, is no coincidence, from Fujinami to Choshu, Yatsu, Tiger Mask, Kobayashi, Hamaguchi and Cobra.

To me, the style used by Maeda and Takada is plenty exciting and both are to be considered. I'm less sure about Fujiwara, as he doesn't show the wide variety of moves, nor is he as exciting. But his niche as the venerable shooter supreme lend aura enough to take him seriously.

I have no problem picking Fujinami No. 1. He's the exemplar. Shows lots of moves and great technique, and has great matches with foes ranging from strong-style Maeda, green Muto, or American brawler Brody. Takada and Maeda employ excellent technique, mixed with submission holds and kicking. They even do things off the ropes. I picked Takada No. 2. Third was Tiger Mask, although I considered Yatsu. Tiger does better spots.

STEVE MUNARI: Fujinami seems to know everything there is to know about wrestling.

DAVE KATZ: Chavo Guerrero comes up with something new and spectacular every week.

GARY ZIMAK: I have to rate Fujinami as one of the best technical wrestlers I've ever seen. His match with Maeda was a classic. I've enjoyed almost every match I've seen him in. Chavo Guerrero is one of the finest, if not the finest technical wrestler in the U.S. Takada is fantastic. If he added flying moves, he could be the most exciting wrestler in the sport.

VIC SHENBERG: The top 10 or 15 are all in Japan. The three best are Fujinami, Yatsu and Takada. They are always enjoyable to watch as they execute difficult maneuvers with apparent ease.

GRANT ZWARYCH: Ted DiBiase's matches always run without a hitch. He always knows what to do next.

JOHN JANCE: Because of his victory in the national freestyle championships, despite having been a pro for several years, Yatsu gets the nod. This is as clear a sign of being technically excellent as you can get.

JEFF BOWDREN: In the U.S., the best are DiBiase, Flair and coming up strong are Williams and Steiner. But the best are found in Japan. Yatsu has the best belly-to-belly suplex in the business. He doesn't just put his opponents into the mat, he drives them through the mat.

BOB CLOSSON: Fujinami can do it all, but he has a strong challenger in Takada. This guy could be the

best if he would get off his UWF ego trip. He'd be something if he worked for Crockett and was allowed to show his stuff.

BEST BRAWLER

1. TERRY GORDY (72).....648
 2. Bruiser Brody (76).....616
 3. Jim Duggan (72).....588
 4. Stan Hansen (33).....307
 5. Ted DiBiase (7).....127
- Honorable Mention: Steve Williams 78

Previous winners

- 1980 - Bruiser Brody
 1981 - Bruiser Brody
 1982 - Bruiser Brody
 1983 - Bruiser Brody
 1984 - Bruiser Brody
 1985 - Stan Hansen

Just like the Americans aren't considered in the technical category, I don't consider Japanese here. The idea here is for the guy to be big (I've seen Jerry Lawler and Dutch Mantell put on better brawls than Brody and Stan Hansen, but they aren't as believable because of the size), look believable dishing it out, look tough, not be afraid to bleed, and sell when it calls for it. A lot of people would consider the Road Warriors because of their aura, but if you dissect their style, you'll see Animal's punches don't look good. Hawk's look great for short spurts, but not when he's in for any length of time, and he can only throw rights. Lawler, Duggan and DiBiase look good because they are basically ambidextrous which makes them doubly as effective. Brody's strength is he uses his boots better than anyone in the history of wrestling--but this isn't his year. Piper isn't bad, but his matches are too short and he doesn't sell. Sawyer more mauls than brawls--there is a difference. Williams is the toughest, but his punches look funky and he can't crack my top three. Flair sells the best, but doesn't come across as a top gun because his foes don't sell back equally well. Murdoch would be here if he was more serious more often. My top two are Gordy and DiBiase, because they look great both dishing it out, and sell great as well. Duggan is third because he looks the best making his brawling comeback--just his stamina is in question and his selling isn't so hot. When Lawler gets it in his mind to have a super match, he belongs. Brody could belong as well, but not with his current opponents. I didn't think Hansen even deserved consideration this go 'round.

MR. MIKE: Watching a sustained brawl between top practitioners is an exhausting experience, so imagine what it is like for them. This is basically the Bruiser Brody award, so we're looking for someone who emulates him.

Although Brody's series with Abdullah wasn't bad, and included one pretty memorable match, it's basically been a difficult year for him.

Based on what I've seen, I'll go with Hansen No. 1. He employs a believable frenzy in his matches and was as all-out wild as anyone I saw. Others to be considered were Duggan, Gordy, DiBiase, Flair just for selling and--you better not laugh, Dump Matsumoto.

The ol' Dumper has had quite an impact this past year. I saw enough vicious shit from this new wave nightmare to chuckle at the prospect of her going against most American guys. From blood to foreign objects, gang-ups to body-part mutilation, she brawls with uncomfortable acumen.

STEVE MUNARI: Brody is the perennial No. 1 here but still deserves it. I don't think he's been knocked off his top spot by anyone.

LARRY LOVELL: Imagery is important, but my top two are Flair and Blanchard, because they can sustain a hot brawling pace in longer matches.

RYAN CLARK: Brody is the best brawler ever--not just this year.

JEFF STEELE: I can't single out any of the Freebirds since they never get into a brawl alone.

GARY ZIMAK: Duggan is at his best in an out-of-control brawl. He's the best in that capacity. Some of his bouts with One Man Gang and Buzz Sawyer were tremendous. Duggan's had the advantage of working with some very talented brawlers this year, unlike Brody. As good as Brody is, it's difficult for him to have a decent match with most of his foes. It's quite a compliment to say some of his matches with Abdullah were very good.

JOHN JANCE: Gordy may become the Brody of the late-1980s. He's so impressive, especially considering his age. The only problem is I'm afraid he's going to self-destruct, but if not, he could be a star into the 21st century.

JEFF BOWDREN: The best ones are in the UWF. Gordy is the best in this style, particularly with his wild bumps. His matches with Gordy show DiBiase is still one of the best in this regard as well. One of the most underrated in this regard is Windham, who had some great brawls with Ron Bass, with Barry doing most of the work and taking the majority of the bumps.

BEST FLIER

1. TIGER MASK (97).....789
 2. Bobby Eaton (120).....760
 3. Chavo Guerrero (27).....270
 4. Negro Casas (25).....213
 5. Keiji Muto (9).....151
- Honorable Mention: Randy Savage 138, Owen Hart 124, Ricky Steamboat 114, Tonga Kid 82, La Fiera 81

Previous winners

- 1981 - Jimmy Snuka
- 1982 - Satoru Sayama
- 1983 - Satoru Sayama
- 1984 - Dynamite Kid
- 1985 - Tiger Mask

This is a young man's ball game, so picking a rookie, while surprising, isn't unheard of. My pick is Owen Hart. He has the entire agility package as good as anyone. He does the best standing dropkick in the game. He's got as many top rope moves--in fact more--than anyone. He does the Mexican style dives threw the ropes. Really, he's the clear winner. Even though Tiger Mask has toned down his style from last year, he still has a wider variety of moves off the ropes and outside the ring than most, so I went with him second. Third place goes to a guy I've never seen--Negro Casas. I've just heard about him, but what I've heard is enough to give him the spot.

MR. MIKE: Off hand I can think of Tiger Mask, Randy Savage, Rick Steamboat, Bobby Eaton, Keiji Muto and even the Dynamite Kid for most of the year. I didn't see any Mexican wrestling where the guys fly around like a bowl of nacho chips after you trip--sorry. Went with Eaton, Tiger Mask and Savage.

STEVE MUNARI: Tiger Mask is the clear winner. He attempts things never before seen in a wrestling ring and does some moves that are purely suicidal.

ROBERT STRAUSS: Fearlessness and finesse are the keys here. Eaton has them both in quantity.

KIM WOOD: Tiger Mask is the best right now, but he certainly is no Sayama.

RYAN CLARK: When Jim Cornette says the lights in the WTBS studio are too close to the ring, he's not kidding when he talks about Eaton. Still, the best one is Owen Hart.

DAVE KATZ: Tiger Mask may not be as good as the original, but he's the best around today. Eaton is the best there is at coming off the top rope.

GARY ZIMAK: Some of Eaton's moves border on insanity. While taking incredible bumps and performing tremendous high flying moves seem like second nature to him, I can't help but feel that he's going to wind up paying for it in the end. It would be a pity to see him wind up like Jimmy Snuka.. Career longevity aside, he's definitely one of the best.

VIC SHENBERG: Chavo Guerrero gets No. 1 for his backflip off the ropes.

BOB CLOSSON: Tiger Mask and Cobra were the best, but Cobra's now been grounded. Muto has the skills to be up there in the future. My picks are Tiger Mask, Black Tiger and Muto.

JEFF BOWDREN: This category has suffered this year. Satoru Sayama has retired, The Cobra has become George Takano (let's face it, George Takano is not The Cobra! He's not allowed to be), and Dynamite Kid has gotten hurt too bad. Because

the competition has crumbled, Eaton has become the prime example of flying wrestling. Savage does some good looking moves, which if you consider his age, is pretty damn impressive. Actually Chris Champion in Florida does most of the same moves Savage does, only does them better. He doesn't just drop off the top ropes onto the floor, he jumps toward his opponent, who is usually 10 to 12 feet away. He also gets higher than anyone else on his dropkicks. Kuniaki Kobayashi hasn't gotten a major push, while Tiger Mask hasn't had anyone who can fly with him since he stopped being matched with Kobayashi. My picks are Eaton, Saito and Champion. Champion better hook up with a major circuit soon, because I don't know how much longer his knees are going to take those leaps to the floor.

MOST OVERRATED

1. HULK HOGAN (148).....861
 2. Dusty Rhodes (28).....472
 3. Paul Orndorff (34).....295
 4. Mike Von Erich (15).....150
 5. Junkyard Dog (2).....144
- Honorable Mention: Lance Von Erich 142, Kevin Von Erich 133, Lex Luger 130, Nikita Koloff 81

Who do we want to pick on and how much? Since being overrated is the byproduct of a successful hype job, this category really isn't negative in some ways. Now some people, like Mike or Lance Von Erich, simply are unpushable, but still are being pushed. Hogan and Nikita are over big with the fans, but don't have the ability to match. Luger is overrated in the magazines because he's photogenic and has a good physique. Dusty is overpushed because he's the booker, just like most sons of wrestling promoters have been throughout the years. So it's hard to pick, but of course nobody can argue with picking Hogan first. I went with Koloff second because he truly is over, and in third place, picked Antonio Inoki.

MR. MIKE: Overrated by who? The public (what do they know), the promotion (betting the poor dumb fools will buy it), or by smart fans?

The ultimate injustice of the recent upheavels in the general perception by the great unwashed of Hulk Hogan being the last word on the subject. Maybe Verne was right after all, that a guy of Hulk's vast wrestling skill shouldn't get to be the champ.

If anyone still thinks Bob Orton is a great wrestler, they remember their videotapes too well and dismiss the present. I also question the ability of Orndorff. It's been four years since he's been in the kind of a match that would justify being highly regarded. Even the way certain people venerate the admittedly hard working Bobby Eaton, great bumps aside, makes me wonder if the past "underrating"

has been more than made up for.

It's the promotions job to overrate wrestlers. Titles confer ability to the fans, so using belts is a classic way to get over those that don't deserve it. On the other hand, promoting Lance or Mike Von Erich as main eventers cannot be forgiven. Lex "Frankenstein" Luger looks the part of a main eventer, but is the embodiment of the "muscles plus looks equal wrestling superstar" syndrome. The fact that Rhodes is allowed to still shine, let alone wear the NWA title involves some kind of psychotic overrated.

It doesn't always work. The AWA tried to overrate Scott Hall, but Hall's innate ability took care of that. Top three are Hogan, overrated by the public; Rhodes, overrated by the promotion; and Orndorff, overrated by smart fans.

STEVE MUNARI: Hogan and Orndorff are my top two. Many won't like my third choice, but it's the way I feel. Ricky Steamboat is an extremely good wrestler who works very hard and does many great moves. But I feel smart fans have thought too much of him and rate him above many others who are better.

PAT HOED: It amazes me how Rhodes still considers himself championship material.

RYAN CLARK: It's my contention the reason Dusty keeps creating skits where his leg/ankle is messed up is so he can spend a lot of time on the mat. He is so completely out of shape that it's a travesty to have him in main events. As a worker, Dusty belongs in the WWF with guys like Hogan and Junkyard Dog.

DAVE KATZ: Orndorff has no charisma, can't do a decent interview and has shown no wrestling ability for at least two years. At least Rhodes can still do a great interview.

GARY ZIMAK: For a guy who can't do anything, Rhodes sure pushes himself hard. Even his fellow-workers spend their interview time trying to get the fat whale over. Of course, as long as fans are buying, why change? Other than looking fierce, what can Nikita Koloff do? It must be something because he gets one hell of a reaction. You'd think by now he'd improve a little, but that hasn't been the case. How a guy like that can main event nationwide, and poor Hector Guerrero gets buried in the opener makes me sick. I chose Savage third for a different reason. Too many fans constantly say how great he is. To be honest, the vast majority of his matches are total disappointments. He gets an awful lot of credit for someone who doesn't put out that much.

GRANT ZWARYCH: I've finally figured out why Dusty named himself the American Dream. If you think he's a good wrestler, then you must be dreaming.

JEFF BOWDREN: Is anyone more overrated than Hogan? I think not, so No. 1 is easy. Actually, almost the entire WWF is eligible. Condorff doesn't do much inside the ring although he's got his act down good outside of it. For a guy who has been pushed, Scott Hall is a zero. This also applies to Dan Spivey, but not to the same extent because he hasn't been given the same type of a push by the promotion. Actually Magnum T.A. didn't have that wide a selection of moves. It wasn't that he wasn't a good wrestler, just that nobody could be as good as Dusty tried to build Magnum up to being. But my top three are Hogan, Hall and Luger--who will never be as good as Bill Apter wants him to be.

MOST UNDERRATED

1. BOBBY EATON (31).....288
 2. Bret Hart (25).....222
 3. Jack Victory (19).....181
 4. Hector Guerrero (18).....148
 5. Chavo Guerrero (16).....112
- Honorable Mention: Masa Fuchi
108, Brad Armstrong 85

Previous winners

- 1980 - Iron Sheik
- 1981 - Buzz Sawyer
- 1982 - Adrian Adonis
- 1983 - Dynamite Kid
- 1984 - Brian Blair
- 1985 - Bobby Eaton

This is a very tough category as well, because what do we mean by underrated? Personally, I think both Eaton and Hart are used well in their respective circuits, and are given the accolades by the TV commentators they deserve. Obnoxious Gino Monsoon is always referring to Hart as having the best execution of moves in the fed, while Dastardly David Crockett and Tony Shiavento compliment Eaton's flying moves. To a lesser extent, I don't consider Victory underrated overall, although his work is very much so. When his personality catches up to his work, then he'll be ready for the big push. Hector Guerrero, on the other hand, should be pushed harder. He got a good response in most every city I've seen him in, and is one of the better guys Crockett has. Masa Fuchi is another good choice, but now he's jr. heavy-weight champ. My picks are Mark Youngblood, a very good wrestler totally wasted in World Class while far less talented and less marketable types are pushed above him, Animal Hamaguchi in Japan, a former big name that has been phased down mainly due to the emergence of Yatsu as a bona-fide superstar, and Fuchi.

MR. MIKE: Under today's conditions, talent alone isn't a factor in getting a push. Some good wrestlers are totally unknown. Some well regarded wrestlers are actually excellent. Others, like Dick Murdoch, are really great, but don't employ their best style in this country, so many fans don't realize it.

Is Bobby Eaton underrated? I'd

say he is by the public at large. But he gets a push, but has no discernable personality. But among fans who can read and write, this high-flying maniac has been nominated for godhood.

Of course the Japanese are underrated by U.S. fans. They've never seen them. But I haven't seen enough to know who is underrated by the Japanese themselves.

I think Rick Rude isn't horrible, occasionally works well, and has good moves. Since many detest his macho-obnoxiousness, they dismiss him as a good wrestler. Rick does look bad a lot, but his matches in Texas and Florida were mostly against rotten or worse foes. The test is now, with a favorable situation of a good tag partner and good foes.

Victory is definitely underrated. But his in-ring ability is developing rapidly. I'm sure he'll eventually get his opportunity. Both he and Shawn Michaels certainly disproved the sophomore jinx theory. Ditto to Keiji Muto, but these guys haven't been around a long time and remained overlooked.

Hector Guerrero has. Even though patronizing lip-service is paid by Crockett and Shiavento, he has the potential to be pushed a lot harder. My top three are Guerrero, Rood and Doug Somers.

LARRY LOVELL: Eaton and Condrey are vastly underrated by many fans who are more impressed with the imagery of the Road Warriors and the Russians. Hamaguchi, being buried by All Japan, and Youngblood, wasted in World Class, are obvious picks.

JOE LANCELLO: Dundee is underrated because of his size, but he made Memphis wrestling for six months this year. Eaton is second because he's overshadowed by Cornette. Third is Jerry Stubbs. I was amazed the first time I saw him. I didn't think guys that good got away from the major promotions.

DAVE KATZ: Although Matt Borne isn't a great wrestler, he is a very good, solid wrestler. But nobody writes anything about how good he is. Koko Ware is a very exciting wrestler to watch and only recently has he gotten a push. Many people still don't realize Eaton is a great talent.

JEFF STEELE: Victory is great. If you had seen Jake Roberts live as a babyface, you'd realize Vince doesn't even have a clue as to what a prize he has. Third is the Midnight Rockers. Why doesn't Verne treat them as gods and rebuild his promotion around them. They could be the biggest stars in the country.

GARY ZIMAK: It's almost criminal to see Crockett use Hector Guerrero in the manner that he does. He is one of the best workers in the NWA and is relegated to meaningless undercard matches and losing ends of TV tag bouts. Maybe it's unrealistic he could be a main eventer, but is it more realistic to push Ron Garvin

as one? Mark Youngblood should have had a much bigger role in World Class. Most of the main eventers in the past year have sucked. In the meantime, this top-notch worker is doing TV jobs. I also think Eddie Gilbert doesn't get the credit he deserves for his wrestling ability. He's a really good worker, who takes fantastic bumps. He also happens to be a great heel.

VIC SHENBERG: Rick Steiner is one hell of a wrestler, yet most fans don't realize it yet. The Rockers deserve to be with a major promotion and get more recognition. Terry Taylor is one of the best wrestlers around. His matches are almost always good, and he does one of the best vertical suplexes. But he's overshadowed by DiBiase when it comes to ability and by Williams and Duggan in popularity.

JCE BOEHT: Bill Irwin is great, but basically unheard of. He did one of the best selling jobs I've ever seen against Giant Baba in Chicago.

JOHN JANCE: The more I watch Koko Ware, I'm surprised to say, the more I enjoy his matches. He works hard and has a great finisher.

JEFF BOWDREN: Victory is starting to get a little push, which is deserved because he's really good. Hart not getting a bigger push is a sin, because he's great. Sam Houston takes the best bumps in the business, and does a great job in making still body-builders look like killers. But the most underrated is the entire Japanese women's promotion.

These girls are fantastic. Most people thought of Buddy Rose & Doug Somers as a joke when they got the tag belts, but they are actually very good.

BEST WRESTLING PROMOTION

1. UWF (175).....986
 2. New Japan (60).....672
 3. Crockett (52).....637
 4. All Japan (25).....492
 5. Titan Sports (13).....203
- Honorable Mention: Jarrett Promotions 150, All Japan Women 121

Previous Winners

- 1983 - Jim Crockett Promotions
 1984 - New Japan Pro Wrestling
 1985 - All Japan Pro Wrestling

The best promotion is the WWF. I don't think there is any question. They are professional to the point of arrogance, the unquestioned leader in their field (and if you don't believe it, just ask them), but once you put the word wrestling in the category, the WWF goes out the window. Since I consider honesty (okay, wrestling is built around a lie, and the most enjoyable promotions are the ones who perpetuate that lie the best) an important qualification, they are doubly doomed. If there's any question there, check out the Dynamite Kid situation.

One important factor in judging a promotion is the percentage of no-shows. For a national promotion, Crockett deserves the highest marks in this regard. They have very few no-shows, and almost none of major proportion without a very legitimate excuse (injury or illness). Titan has gotten better in that regard as well, but can't hold a candle. Actually, the Japanese has almost zero in the way of no-shows, so they even beat out Crockett.

But to me, the best is a group which can keep the fans excited and draw well, be entertaining to watch either as a mark or a smart fan--and most importantly, deliver the goods at the arena. In addition, they shouldn't push too many non-talents, although you can't find one promotion that doesn't push a few.

In my book, New Japan has the talent and the heat to be the best. But there are so many internal problems and ridiculous booking decisions (ie Steve Williams getting pinned by Inoki on his first tour, Takada doing a job for middle-aged booker Sakaguchi during the IWGP series, etc) that they fall off. All Japan has good action from top to bottom, but is stale in many ways. UWF has good quality wrestlers, the best TV show, and lots of good angles. From what I've seen of Crockett's live shows, they are excellent by and large, and they do a super job on the "big show" concept. It's the pushing of some of their guys that's hard to take.

But to me the group which makes the best use of its talent and provides as good action as anyone (the best matches I've seen all year have been from here as much as anywhere) is the Japanese women's group. The best part of this group is that anybody can get pinned at any time. Chigusa Nagayo, the group's super babyface, can get pinned, clean, in the center, no tights, no foreign objects, no ropes, and she's over more than any babyface save Hogan, who plays superman. I picked Crockett second and All Japan third, with UWF fourth and New Japan fifth.

In truth, however, I don't feel I can judge this adequately because I haven't seen any "average" live shows of any of these groups, which is the real test.

MR. MIKE: By virtually any criteria one wants to use, Bill Watts' UWF is this country's best promotion. Good matches? Good angles? Quality of wrestlers? Gets a good work rate from the wrestlers? Least deceiving and least insulting to fans' intelligence? Good TV? Entertaining? Except for employing farce (like WWF), I can't think of where the UWF could be outdone.

I further applaud the UWF because in 1986 they made a difficult decision--in order to survive and flourish, upgrade and going national was the only way to go. They have to compete in new markets. And most

of the odds are against them. But their strength is having good wrestling as the product, and displaying more outward front-office intelligence than most of the rest of the promotions combined. One considerable handicap is no national cable exposure. So they've aggressively syndicated their TV shows, with the dubious advantage of having superior ratings in a regional market. But they've done a good job with syndication. Here in Minneapolis is a good example. They've got a Saturday 10:30 a.m. time slot on the market's No. 1 station, a CBS affiliate. This station hasn't had wrestling in at least 25 years. Crockett, on the other hand, is on a new UHF independent. UWF is also the best in creating and developing new talent. Despite some booking flaws and occasional use of questionable talent (Korchenko) and almost impossible disadvantages in going national (no visibility before this year, lack of talent that's "over" nationwide), marketing base out of Texas-Oklahoma and just being the third entrant, and in some cases the fourth, in already oversaturated markets. But they've weathered the Titan storm better than anyone except Crockett, and in all likelihood will remain in existence and be successful as a large regional/semi-national group.

From a smart-fan standpoint, UWF has the best work and good angles. They seem to lie and deceive the least. Really, all they do is the standard "injuries" while the wrestler goes to Japan. Problem there is as DiBiase, Williams and Gordy continue their regular tours, they better cut down on bogus injuries or they'll alienate some fans. They are probably smart enough to eventually realize that.

Crockett runs a pretty good promotion. In some ways, they are excellent. They've got great workers, good TV (though longwinded and overexposed), and some pretty hot booking. Rhodes being on top is pretty bad, but it works okay and only offends non-brain dead fans. They deserve credit for three ambitious promotional concepts--the tag team tournament, the month-long Bash tour and Starcade. They were all artistic successes, although the first two were a mixed big financially. Still, in image and impact, they are definitely Major League.

Their weakness is their syndicated network should be in better shape. They should be on stronger stations in the major markets. They don't seem conscious enough of this, compared to WWF and UWF. They seem to be relying too much on WTBS, which is a mistake.

Crockett's success in WWF markets (Baltimore and Philadelphia) is a testament to the quality of their product and differentiation between their wrestling and the WWF. Still, they've got three problems, too much

Rhodes, redundant TV shows and too much Rhodes.

The WWF is an excellent promotion, but wrestling isn't what they are good at, so they are dismissed from consideration.

Even under the most charitable of circumstances, no other promotion in this country can be considered.

It's hard for me to compare and contrast the Japanese men's groups. Beyond question they present the best wrestling in the world. Baba has the best talent pool in wrestling, but was stale in 1986. Inoki was fresher with the UWF infusion, but couldn't exploit the rivalry properly because they avoided the Inoki vs. Maeda showdown match. I'll pick UWF first, All Japan second, and a tie between Inoki and Crockett for third.

JEFF BOWDREN: There are only three I'd consider, the two from Japan and the UWF. The best thing about the UWF is it's never dull. Every week there is something worth watching. Another positive is that the UWF claims to employ athletes and not actors, and it's pretty much the truth. Like every promotion, they have a few stiffs, but the key to their success is the guys like Rick Steiner low on the card. They have the best work rate in the U.S. Crockett may have a few outstanding matches per card, but the overall quality is better with the UWF. All Japan could use Bill Watts in the front office jazzing up the angles. That's their only problem. New Japan's biggest problem is Inoki still thinks he's 25. They have the hottest wrestlers in Japan at their disposal, yet Inoki still puts himself over Maeda and Fujinami.

ROBERT STRAUSS: UWF consistently surprises me. That's what I like most about the business. The few times I've seen the Japanese women I've been blown away, but that's probably because I have so little exposure to Japanese wrestling. Crockett has gotten stale, but Dusty always comes up with great angles when he has to.

KIM WOOD: Because of their UWF influx, New Japan is the best. Crockett is getting a little stale because of lack of talent turnover at the top, but their live shows are really great. The fan gets his money's worth. All Japan presents wrestling at very high standards.

PAT HOED: UWF and New Japan are the best. I picked Portland third, even though they keep losing ground on everyone else. I still admire and respect the honest manner in which the promotion is run. There is no excessive hype or endless announcer banter, just good old-fashioned pro wrestling.

RYAN CLARK: I picked UWF No. 1. Sure, Japan has the best overall talent, but I don't like the fact it takes 45 piledrivers and three gun shots before you can get a pin. Also, there are too many double count outs

and not good enough feuds. UWF has both good talent and good angles.

BEST TELEVISION SHOW

1. UNIVERSAL/UWF (237).....1,269
 2. Memphis live show (22).....400
 3. New Japan (15).....336
 - All Japan (0).....336
 5. Power Pro/UWF (7).....295
- Honorable Mention: WWF Superstars 165, Crockett Worldwide 148, Japanese Girls 117

Finally a category I can speak with some authority on. Having seen them all, the two best in my mind are the UWF shows, both the Tulsa show and the Fort Worth show. The good matches are good, and even the squashes are good squashes. I went with the Tulsa show first, based on tenure and the fact it probably, over the course of the last few months, had more great matches and some smart-ass remarks by Michael Hayes. The videos are well done--I enjoy the entire package except the interview promos. I can't get into guys talking to a camera without a host involved, and can't get into their spiel when you hear voices and on the screen is the details of where the card will be.

I marvel at the WWF package. Slick, technically state-of-the-art, great lighting, great camera work. To the unaided eye, it blows the rest of them away. The only problem is, while I marvel at the show, I generally turn it off within 10 minutes. No go.

I'm pretty good about watching Crockett's WTBS shows when I've got nothing better to do. Even then, I'm basically reading a book and put the book down when Flair, Garvin or Cornette are around. If I can't pay full attention, it can't crack the top three.

Memphis is close. I watch the show religiously, but fast forward through a lot, mainly watching the hijinx (which are the best around) and the interviews, which are believable. Much credit here to Lance Russell and Jerry Lawler, the glue that keeps the show together. But Memphis is missing top-flight talent, so the best it can finish is 5th.

The rest are heavy fast-forward button material. Stampede Wrestling, when Owen Hart, Ben Bassarab or the Viet Cong are around, has super matches, but that one camera stuff and the awful matches with George Skoaland, Ted Arcidi, Bill Kazmaier, Dave Barbee, etc. literally weigh it down.

So we head to Japan for our third pick. I'm going with Baba's show over Inoki's based on fewer bad matches. Both are great technically and have the best actual matches to be found. Inoki's is too Inoki oriented which means the last

match on the show is a letdown, because Inoki can never match up to Fujinami or Takada. Baba spreads the top spot around, and even though Yatsu, say, is better than Tsuruta, Jumbo can and often does have great matches so not as much letdown. Baba also books better Americans, although the Americans are almost obsolete as besides a handful, you'd almost rather not see them.

MR. MIKE: There's a few good candidates. Good wrestling and good television are not identical. Programming factors include pace, variety, atmosphere, good announcers, interest and excitement. The flip side is technical considerations--camera, direction design and the whole post-production gamut. Of course if the wrestling is good, that helps.

Top considerations go to the Japan shows, UWF and Power Pro, Memphis, the Crockett package and WWF Superstars.

The UWF, Crockett and WWF shows are all technically first-rate. The atmosphere on all shows is good, thanks to either the most satisfied or most manipulated audiences anywhere. The WWF Vince-Jesse-Bruno trio is quite entertaining, so long as one doesn't focus on the matches. Atmosphere and pacing are good, Ventura adds a lot to the commentary which is usually better than the matches. With good and bad skits, comedy and their storyline, they virtually never stop to give you good wrestling.

Crockett's Worldwide show was at its hottest just before the American Bash. The angles were hot, and they were over. Naturally that couldn't last. The seven second matches don't bother me, but the seven minute interviews aren't just overdone, they're fried to the point of carbonization. And then there's David Crockett.

It's impossible for me to judge the Japanese shows except for their content--out of this world.

As far as the best shows go, we're back to where we were last year--the UWF and Memphis. They are the two most enjoyable, with startling contrasts. You've got a slick multi-camera arena atmosphere, or classic 1960s TV studio one-take live show. Veteran top-flight talent or basically a rookie training ground. The common factors are the best announcing, good angles, creative booking and unpredictability.

Previous winners

- 1983 - New Japan Pro Wrestling
- 1984 - New Japan Pro Wrestling
- 1985 - Mid South (now UWF) Wrestling

STEVE MINARI: For my money, it's got to be the New Japan show. They have the best wrestlers, and the highest work rate.

ROBERT STRAUSS: The Japanese women blow me away. UWF is a great show, obviously. And I have no idea why, maybe just praying things will get better, but I never miss WWF Superstars, but I never watch their other shows either.

PAT HOED: That UWF show with the three title changes was pushing things, but overall they put together a consistently great show. "Spanky" shouldn't scream so much, however.

RYAN CLARK: UWF is the kind of wrestling you would love to see live. Plus, with Michael Hayes running around, anything can happen.

GARY ZIMAK: There is no doubt in my mind the UWF is the best. The sure-fire way to realize this is it's the show I can't wait to watch every week. The angles are kept fresh and the matches are tremendous. The only complaint I have is them beginning matches with 30 seconds left to go.

MATCH OF THE YEAR

1. RIC FLAIR VS. BARRY WINDHAM
2-14 Orlando (31).....325
 2. Choshu-Yatsu vs. Tsuruta-Tenryu
1-28 Tokyo (55).....322
 3. Tatsumi Fujinami vs. Akira Maeda
6-12 Osaka (39).....267
 4. Midnight Express vs. Rock'n'Roll
8-16 Philadelphia (16).....174
 5. Nobuhiko Takada vs. Shiro Koshinaka
9-19 Fukuoka (27).....172
- Honorable Mention: Fantastics vs. Shepherders 4-19 New Orleans 147,
Midnight Rockers vs. Buddy Rose-
Doug Somers 8-7 Las Vegas 132,
The Cobra vs. Nobuhiko Takada
6-17 Nagoya 129, Ric Flair vs.
Ricky Morton 7-5 Charlotte 97,
British Bulldogs vs. Greg Valentine-
Brutus Beefcake 4-7 Chicago 76

Previous winners

- 1980 - Bob Backlund vs. Ken Patera
in Madison Square Garden
1981 - Pat Patterson vs. Sgt. Slaughter
in Madison Square Garden
1982 - Tiger Mask vs. Dynamite Kid
in Tokyo
1983 - Ric Flair vs. Harley Race
in Greensboro
1984 - Freebirds vs. Von Erichs
in Fort Worth
1985 - Tiger Mask vs. Kuniaki Kobayashi
in Tokyo

This one is just opinion, as every year there are several great matches. I can't exactly put my finger on what separates a normally great match from a match of the year candidate. But, to me, match of the year candidates were few. It's that special type of match that is filled with heat and emotion, technically excellent, and possibly has an angle or twist to cap it off.

I'm going to pick best match first by circuit. For Titan, the best match I saw was in Madison Square Garden between Tito Santana and Randy Savage on April 21. This was an example of Savage living up to, and surpassing his rep. Santana basically was carried.

Crockett's stuff is harder to judge. There have been many Rock'n'Roll-Midnight Express matches that have been excellent. None that I saw stands out as a candidate. The Ric Flair-Dusty Rhodes match where Baby Doll turned from Charlotte was the best one I've seen, although

based on what I've heard, the Flair-Morton match from Charlotte was even better.

I'm sure the Flair-Windham match which won this category is Florida's best candidate. The best match I saw all year in Alabama was between Brad Armstrong and Jerry Stubbs. Going to Memphis, the Lawler-Dundee match from December which Lawler lost, because of the surprise result, is a standout, although the best one I saw was a tag match with Lawler & Dutch Mantell vs. Dundee & Buddy Landel under Texas Death rules. That was as good a brawl as I saw all year in the US. UWF has a lot of candidates--Ted DiBiase vs. Dick Murdoch on New Years' Eve comes to mind, as does TV bouts with DiBiase-Williams vs. Hayes-Roberts lumberjack style and Taylor vs. John Tatum. The first Steve Williams vs. Terry Gordy TV match, where Bill Watts counted the false three count, and the second one--with the phony double pin, were good for different reasons. The first was a super match, the second had a super last few minutes. That Rockers vs. Rose-Somers AWA bloodbath on TV was certainly the best thing I saw from that group. Going to Calgary, a 50 minute draw with Owen Hart & Ben Bassarab against the Viet Cong Express may have been the best pure scientific match in North America.

But, as usual, the real standout matches are in Japan. My pick for match of the year was our runner-up with Choshu-Yatsu vs. Tsuruta-Tenryu. 25 minutes of one big move after another, sustained heat and intensity, with Choshu selling the injured ribs to add to the drama. Second is Fujinami vs. Maeda--in some ways it didn't have as many big moves as some of the other, but for intensity, heat, brutality and realism, it was as good a match as I've ever seen. My third pick was Akira Maeda vs. Don Nakaya Neilsen for the same reason--again there weren't a lot of big moves or anything like that, but when you watched it, you believed--without question. With all the news I get about wrestling, when I can watch a match and feel that way, it's really something. Almost any match involving Chigusa Nagayo and Dump Matsumoto lies for fourth.

STEVE MUNARI: I've got to go with the match where Koshinaka beat Takada for the IWGP jr. title. I haven't seen a better match, with more great near falls and one great maneuver after another.

ROBERT STRAUSS: I put Hogan and Bundy from Wrestlemania on top because of the heat involved from watching the match in person. Hogan's entrance over the top of the cage and his power-slam of Bundy were okay on tape, but great at the arena.

DAVE KATZ: Midnight Express and the Road Warriors from Baltimore on 7/19. Great action from bell-to-bell and the Roadies even sold a little. Cornette was thrown around at the end.

GARY ZIMAK: Fujinami vs Maeda was the pick here. Even though it didn't feature a lot of high flying moves or brawling in the stands, it was unmatched as far as sheer brutality goes. You could just about feel every kick that Maeda delivered and feel sorry for Fujinami. The reaction when Fujinami finally made his comeback was something I've never witnessed before. All of this, coupled, with Fujinami's severe head cut (blood pouring out on the mat had to be one of the most disgusting things I've ever seen) added up to make it the most brutal match I've ever seen.

KURT BROWN: The Fujinami-Maeda match was definitely one of the five best matches I've ever seen. I saw a 6-man tag in Los Angeles (Hijo Del Santo-Manda Guerrero-Super Muneco vs. Kato Kung Lee-Negro Casas-Ricky Boy) where Negro Casas and Hijo Del Santo worked great with one another and Super Muneco was a walking hallucination.

STEVE GERBER: Dump Matsumoto & Yasuka Ishiguro vs. Bull Nakano & Condor Saito - Action, brawling, the ultimate in violence involving kendo sticks, empty gas cans, nunchakus between supposed tag team partners. After almost killing each other Dump and Bull meet in the ring, nose to nose. After a stare-down, they shake hands and Dump keels over backwards, unconscious, due to loss of blood.

ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

1. BAM BAM BIGELOW (193).....1,122
2. Owen Hart (78).....661
3. Sting (18).....243
4. Savannah Jack (6).....72
5. Chris Benoit (6).....70

Previous winners

- 1980 - Barry Windham
- 1981 - Brad Armstrong (tie)
Brad Rheingans
- 1982 - Steve Williams
- 1983 - Road Warriors
- 1984 - Tom Zenk (tie)
Keiichi Yamada
- 1985 - Jack Victory

If nothing else, 1986 was a great year for rookies, maybe out of necessity more than anything else. With the major circuits gobbling up virtually every name piece of talent, the smaller circuits, particularly Florida and Memphis along with Calgary, were forced to develop their own stars.

We've got more rookies getting a chance, and subsequently getting a push than ever before. Some of them are pretty good, and lots of them will be major forces in wrestling.

I should point out that Lex Luger, who was named rookie of the year in the Apter-mags, was not a rookie by our standards--even so, after much warnings, he still received several votes. In fact, if eligible, he'd probably have been easily in 4th place. A few years ago, Phil LaFleur was a landslide winner, only for us to have to negate his votes for the same reason.

In most years, it's hard to come up with one good rookie. This year, it was difficult to limit it to three. Those who could have won in other years--but couldn't crack the top three included Johnny Smith, Sting, Chris Benoit and Jeff Jarrett. Two others that at least would have been contenders--the Angel of Death and Chris Youngblood, were also lost in the shuffle. I expect everyone of them, besides Benoit, who seems to have disappeared, and perhaps Smith, because of size limitations, to eventually become a big star in this business.

At the same time, my top two picks were easy. Owen Hart is the best rookie I've ever seen and a clear-cut choice. Bam Bam Bigelow is the most agile big man (350+ pounds) I've ever seen, rookie or veteran. He'd have won in a breeze in any other year.

For third place, I was torn between two of the best new athletes in the business today--Hiroshi Hase and Shinobu Kandori. Kandori is just so solid and tough, for someone in four months to hold a World title and probably be one of the 15 or 20 best women wrestlers in the world (except for Leilani Kai, she's already better than anyone in the U.S., and she'll surpass Kai by her eighth month in the biz). Hase (The Golden Grappler of the Viet Cong Express) still gets my vote. Give him one more year and he'll be able to dominate the jr. heavyweight division for Baba. Another certain future superstar.

MR. MIKE: Certainly there was lots of quantity, as the Eddie Sharkey, Hiro Matsuda and Red Bastien sausage machines kept grinding them out. But some quality as well as the Japanese and Calgary promotions continued to introduce some good wrestlers to the biz.

The most talked about rookie was Bam Bam Bigelow, he of the colorful cranium. Trained by Larry Sharpe, and held back for over a year, he has incredible agility for his size. I missed his Memphis tour, which was his best stuff. I saw some Texas stuff, but it's hard to get a good picture from there as his opponents were bad and his build-up almost non-existent. But it looked that he had poise and savvy and knew how to work a match. He looked much better than a rookie should.

Talked about in the Observer was Owen Hart. I, and most people, haven't had a chance to see him. Knowing his family background and long, unofficial apprenticeship, I don't have any problem voting him in second.

I also thought Chris Youngblood showed moves, combinations and ability that also belied his rookie status. Seeing that in World Class rings makes any accomplishment stand out even more.

Jarrett shows some aptitude. Lots of super-athletes (Magee, Kazmeir, Arcidi, Gaylord) showed

much.

JEFF BOWDREN: Bam Bam Bigelow and his nuclear splash was the most publicized. I didn't see his Memphis stuff, but he still looked damn good in World Class. Chris Youngblood, for his age, is very impressive. Tom Magee is a stud athlete to be sure, but certainly doesn't move around as well. Sting has made so much improvement, going from a Dingo-like stiff to a good wrestler, so I picked him first.

STEVE MUNARI: There's only one choice--Owen Hart. What a flier.

ROBERT STRAUSS: Bigelow has superstar written all over him. So why the hell did he go to Texas and change his name?

PAT HOED: This was a tough decision to give it to Sting, but he made so much improvement. Bigelow is really impressive, however. I considered his Texas Death Match with Jerry Lawler for match of the year.

GARY ZIMAK: Bigelow is the best rookie I've seen in a long time. His agility is outstanding. I know Jerry Blackwell used to drop kick, but they looked like the kind of drop kicks a fat slob would use. Bigelow dropkicks like a 220-pounder. He carries himself very well for someone who looks like he's too heavy. But they had no idea how to use him in World Class. This guy can be one of the biggest superstars in the business.

GRANT ZWARYCH: Chris Benoit is a hard worker and looks very promising. He takes good bumps and puts forth one hell of an effort.

JOHN JANCE: Such a great worker for someone so big and so young. Bigelow is obviously going places.

BOB CLOSSON: I've seen Owen Hart and father Stu has been blessed again.

MANAGER OF THE YEAR

1. JIM CORNETTE (222).....1,203
 2. Bobby Heenan (33).....625
 3. Jimmy Hart (4).....150
 4. Percy Pringle (5).....133
 5. J.J. Dillon (0).....117
- Honorable Mention: Scandor Akbar 106

Previous winners

- 1983 - Jimmy Hart
1984 - Jimmy Hart
1985 - Jim Cornette

First off, Cornette and Heenan are the two best. Cornette is a lot better live and does a better interview, but I can't cut down Heenan a bit. I'd like to pick Tojo Yamamoto for third. The guy is great, in a perverse way. Bill Dundee has been excellent at ringside. J.D. Costello wasn't bad in Memphis, and had a few memorable interviews once he got it going. I have a strong suspicion Downtown Bruno, if he stays around, will crack the top three next year. I didn't consider him this time out since he didn't start for a name

group until a few weeks ago--but watch out. Wakamatsu and Eddie Gilbert are okay as well. My third choice is Pringle. I thought I'd never want to see this guy, but his "fat pussy" role is tremendous.

MR. MIKE: Last year I thought Heenan and Cornette were the best. I picked Heenan because I thought he was being used better. Well, in 1986, Cornette eliminated any question about who was the best. At the arena, on the stick, whatever, Cornette is both the best and most effective.

Contenders for third were Jimmy Hart, a submerged shadow of his former brilliance; J.J. Dillon, who does nothing for me but seems to be over and effective; Ditto Scandor Akbar. I didn't consider part-time managers like Eddie Gilbert or Larry Zbyszko (who would be better off as a full-timer). I can't judge Wakamatsu other than visually.

My third pick is Pringle--funny, obnoxious, overbearing and effective.

JEFF BOWDREN: Cornette has been great all year. He's done a great job on interviews, angles and has been good at ringside. Heenan is good, but a very distant second. Dillon has been as good as ever, but being on the same circuit as Cornette sometimes makes him forgettable. His interviews are first rate.

STEVE MUNARI: I enjoyed Cornette more when he was with Mid South, but he's certainly still the best.

MICHAEL GENDELMAN: I really don't enjoy any manager other than Cornette.

RYAN CLARK: "Jim-Jim" as his mother calls him "when he's hurt" is the best manager ever. If it wasn't for him, WTBS ratings would suffer.

GARY ZIMAK: There are no doubts in my mind Cornette is the best. He's the best at every facet, from generating heat at ringside to interviews, far surpassing everyone else. He adds a great deal to the Midnight Express, whereas most managers detract. At the arena, he always knows the right thing to say if the heat threatens to die down. I enjoy Heenan and Dillon as well. Dillon is generally entertaining, but nowhere near the caliber of Cornette.

VIC SHENBERG: Cornette is excellent, but I picked Eddie Gilbert because I like UWF a lot more than NWA.

JOE BECHT: Heenan is still my favorite.

JOHN JANCE: Heenan may have undercut Albano, subdued Hart and taken the impetus away from Slick, but his experience and gift of gab has grown on me. His banter with the obnoxious WWF coterie has been honed so well his position can't be denied.

BEST TV ANNOUNCER

1. LANCE RUSSELL (112).....702
2. Jim Ross (79).....573
3. Tony Shiavone (18).....273

4. Gordon Solie (9)67
5. Ichiro Furutachi (9).....63.

previous winners

- 1981 - Gordon Solie
- 1982 - Gordon Solie
- 1983 - Gordon Solie
- 1984 - Lance Russell
- 1985 - Lance Russell

With all the televised wrestling I see, you'd thinking picking three announcers in this category would be easy. Okay, picking two was easy. Lance Russell is still my No. 1 choice, although he's been surpassed in play-by-play by Jim Ross. The way he handles interviews with basically nervous green guys, hosts a live show, and somehow manages to make the most bizarre angles seem realistic is enough to put him on top. Wrestling needs more people like him.

For a guy whose main contribution to announcing used to be to introduce Bill Watts, Ross has come a long way. His fall-by-fall is great and I enjoy his approach as well. Basically, he never insults your intelligence, comes across as just another excited fan, yet never seems like he's being phony or overdoing it. Having the best matches around to call doesn't hurt, but I always seem to be able to pick up something, whether it's a clever remark or something about guys' styles, from listening to his commentary.

Third is tougher. I went with Florida's Stan Rhoades. A newcomer who is pleasant to listen to and talks to the view as if he's an intelligent human being.

Tony Shiavone has great announcing skills and when he's not with Crockett is really good, but at times doesn't give enough background information on the guys.

MR. MIKE: You can count the good ones on the foot of a three-toed sloth. Most announcers best qualities are obnoxiousness and ineptitude. Only a few achieve some sort of a neutral effectiveness. How many convey information, talk without overtalking, interact well with the wrestlers, and don't have a voice frequency that can sterilize frogs?

There's nothing new to say about Lance Russell. He's still the best. He's one of the few who adds to a show and the only one who makes a show. He comes off as "real," rather than a trained/paid announcer-relative-ego freak.

Jimmy Ross is also very good. Only complaint is his tendency toward overexcitement. Sort of a non-nauseating David Crockett. His commentary is interesting and he's certainly inoffensive.

Cl' Shiavonte is pleasant, but seems to have no personality. His problem is he spends too much time agreeing with Crockett's disgusting, revolting, patronizing prattle.

Bill Watts, Joe Pedecino and Mick Karch don't seem to really

qualify in this category for lack of exposure and the fact Pedecino doesn't often do play-by-play.

JEFF BOWDREN: Jim Ross is in a class by himself. He can make a match between two jobbers exciting.

JOE LANCELLO: After Ross and Russell it's not even close. Shiavone gets third just because he's the least objectionable of the rest.

DAVE KATZ: Ross knows wrestling and his emotion is believable. Shiavone knows his wrestling and knows when to shut up during people's interviews.

GARY ZIMAK: Ross stands out as excellent in an era when terrible ones dominate the airwaves. His greatest asset is the ability to play "straight man" when the need arises. Too many announcers today feel they always have to be the star of the show. Ross knows the stars of the show are the wrestlers, not himself. His only drawback is he sometimes screams too much.

Shiavone is a real pro. He is basically a good announcer, doing wrestling rather than a wrestling personality playing announcer. He keeps his composure and is a welcome relief from Crockett's screaming and yelling. Russell is very smooth and adds a touch of humor. It's a shame the rest aren't in the same class as these three.

BOB CLOSSON: Lance Russell is the winner. This will always be my opinion.

WORST TV ANNOUNCER

1. DAVID CROCKETT (42).....400
2. Bill Mercer (56).....399
3. Gorilla Monsoon (39).....376
4. Barry Richards (57).....353
5. Larry Nelson (24).....216

Honorable Mention: Rod Trongard 189, Vince McMahon 184, Lord James Blears 147, Lord Al Hayes 91, Gene Okerlund 90, Ernie Ladd 85

Previous winners 1984- Angel Mosca
1985 - Gorilla Monsoon

I really have a tough time here. So many of them are bad, but to what degree. For instance, Crockett is bad, but I really don't mind him that much. Al Hayes is awful, but I feel sorry for him more than anything else. Monsoon and McMahon are like fingernails on the chalkboard, however. I was listening to Blears and Trongard do an AWA TV show, and a friend (not a wrestling fan) thought it was Bob and Ray doing a comedy announcer routine--in others words--trying to be bad. That's embarrassing to admit you're a fan under those circumstances. Actually there are a dozen I want to vote for first place. The only reason Barry Richards doesn't get it is because he's not with a major group. I'm going with Monsoon, Richards than Mercer, but how can I leave the AWA trionout?

MR. MIKE: Rod Tronguard and Lord Blears are truly god awful. Trongard's bleat can sterilize frogs and his

disinterest and lack of any knowledge of wrestling's subtleties is ever apparent. His occasional flights of fancy into the dim past are for some reason unsettling. Can you hear his arteries harden as he utters his repetitive prattle? Coupled with his unique pronunciation of various words and names, he and Blears fight right in with an otherwise torn and tacky schizoid show. The AWA comes off as incoherent minor league, bad mainline talent, bad prelim talent, third-rate recycled angles that are pushed with incredible ineptitude.

A close second, and frankly he seems to be trying harder to be bad is that World Class ass, Bill Mercer. "Lord have Mercer." He stumbles around half conscious with total disinterest through all phases of the job. This of course, makes him the perfect announcer for the Von Erichs. Names, dates, facts, holds, the very action in front of your face gets some sort of lobotomized treatment from the indolent Mr. Microphone.

LARRY LOVELL: Monsoon's tired cliches and pompous attitude give him the nod over Crockett's ravings and Okerlund's smugness.

PAT HOED: Dick Holloway, who was Barry Richards' replacement during the second coming of California Championship Wrestling, used to be referred to on the air as "Big Dick" by color commentator Jerry Graham. Some of his classic phrases, invented by Richards included "that was a step over twisted ear," "what an incredible flying beard pull!" Richards had to be heard to be believed.

DAVE KATZ: Bill Mercer hurts World Class even worse than the Von Erichs.

GARY ZIMAK: This is the toughest category, being that there is an overabundance of bad announcers. There is no doubt who is the worst, Bill Mercer. He is totally incompetent, has no idea of what's going on in the ring. I cringe when I hear him call the piledriver an "atomic smash" or when he called a German suplex a roll-up. Mercer isn't the least bit obnoxious, but he is a terrible announcer.

To me, the words obnoxious and Larry Nelson are synonyms. Nelson is the most annoying person I've ever listened to. I know he doesn't believe it, but you can't ban every hold. Have you ever watched the faces he makes doing interviews? One of the best things I've seen was when Stan Hansen attacked him at the Comiskey Park show.

BOB CLOSSON: Barry Richards knows about as much about wrestling as Boxcar Willie knows about opera.

CATEGORY B

These awards based on first place votes received:

BEST WRESTLING MOVE

1. CHAVO GUERRERO'S BACKFLIP FLYING BODY PRESS.....76
 2. Jake Roberts' DDT.....40
 3. Dynamite Kid's suplex off the top rope.....21
- Other top contenders: Ric Flair's flip into the turnbuckles and landing on his feet 15, Bobby Eaton's top rope leaps 13, Keiji Muto's backward splash off the top rope 12, Rick Steiner's belly-to-belly suplex 9, Nobuhiko Takada's fullnelson into a german suplex (dragon suplex) 7, Tiger Mask's flip off the top rope into a leg lariat 7, Negro Casas' bump off the top ropes to the floor 7

Previous winners

- 1981 - Jimmy Snuka's leap off the top ropes
 1982 - Super Destroyer (Scott Irwin) doing the superplex
 1983 - Snuka's top rope leap
 1984 - Davey Boy Smith's power clean in combination with Dynamite Kid's dropkick off the top rope
 1985 - Tiger Mask's dive, with a mid-air flip, outside the ring

HARDEST WORKING WRESTLER

1. RIC FLAIR.....246
 2. Tatsumi Fujinami.....18
 3. Bret Hart.....12
- Other top contenders: Ricky Steamboat 10, Terry Gordy 9, Sam Houston 6, Ted DiBiase 5, Bobby Eaton 5

Previous winners

- 1983 - Dynamite Kid
 1984 - Ric Flair
 1985 - Ric Flair

BIGGEST SHOCK

1. MAGNUM T.A.'S ACCIDENT.....87
 2. Gino Hernandez' death.....79
 3. Harley Race in WWF.....24
- Other top contenders: Kerry Von Erich's motorcycle accident 6, Demise of AWA 6, Demise of World Class 6, AWA title not changing hands in the ring and way it was handled 6

Previous winners

- 1981 - Tommy Rich holding NWA title
 1982 - Otto Wanz winning AWA title
 1983 - Harley Race beating Ric Flair to win the NWA title
 1984 - Death of David Von Erich
 1985 - WWF getting on network TV

MOST DISGUSTING PROMOTIONAL TACTIC

1. EQUATING AN ANGLE (CHRIS ADAMS' BLINDNESS) WITH GINO HERNANDEZ' DEATH.....45
 2. Mud matches in World Class...28
 3. Adrian Adonis' gay act.....24
- Other top contenders: Continued use of Magnum T.A.'s name in Starcade hype 22, Kevin Von Erich's interview where he said his brother was killed in a match by a kick to the stomach 21,

overusage of celebrities at
 Wrestlemania II 12, John Boyd-
 Jeff Jarrett snake pit match in
 Memphis 11, Parking lot incident
 with Rhodes & four (three) horseman
 9 "Make it good," Roddy Piper vs.
 Mr. T match 9, The idea that
 nothing (injuries, titles changes,
 etc.) has happened until it airs
 on TV--so guys can defend belts
 after losing them till the TV
 airs 9, Wrestlemania Battle Royal
 with football players 6, Wheeling
 Kerry Von Erich out for every big
 show 6, Chris Adkisson (Von Erich)
 saying after Kevin's title win that
 "god" gave us another World champion
 6

MR. MIKE: For sheer disgust, I
 could do volumes on these multi-
 generational assholes from Texas
 and their attempt at a moral-religious
 tone while lying, covering up and
 fabricating things far beyond all
 other wrestling promotions combined.
 They've lied to the point of self-
 deception. What got me the most,
 beyond fictional titles and fictional
 title changes, beyond real tragedy
 equated with an angle, beyond
 insulting mud wrestling matches,
 beyond exploiting personal tragedy
 to the hilt, was Kevin Von Erich's
 interview where he makes a reference
 to the martyred diety brother David,
 and informs us how David died from
 getting kicked in the stomach in a
 match. That's one incredibly stupid
 lie too many for me. Total contemptable
 sleaze.

GARY ZIMAK: It's a total joke
 that a promotion based on lies and
 poor taste refers to itself as World
 Class. The bit with Adams' blindness
 and it being correlated with Hernandez'
 death was too much for me to take.
 I was expecting them to dig up
 the corpse and charge the fans
 to have their picture taken with
 it. Their whole promotion is a
 disgrace to the sport.

JCE LANCELLO: They range from
 just plain sick (death box matches),
 disbelief (Piper vs. T boxing
 match), to dangerous working
 conditions (scaffold matches).
 Put me down for the entire
 Wrestlemania II package including
 the washed-up flashes in the pan,
 celebrity commentators who don't
 know a piledriver from a pile of
 excrement.

Previous winners

1981 - Usage of The Monster (and
 saying he was built in a laboratory)
 in Los Angeles
 1982 - Bob Backlund as WWF champion
 1983 - Pretending Eddie Gilbert had
 re-injured his neck after an auto
 accident injured him in the first
 place
 1984 - Blackjack Mulligan's phony
 heart attack in Florida
 1985 - Usage of Mike Von Erich's near
 fatal illness to sell Cotton Bowl
 tickets

BEST TV COLOR COMMENTATOR

1. MICHAEL P.S. HAYES.....159
 2. Jesse Ventura.....105
 3. Nick Bockwinkel.....18
 Other contenders: Jim Cornette 15,
 Bobby Heenan 6

MR. MIKE: Only two come across
 well to me. Jesse Ventura has
 talent and wit. He's very enter-
 taining, which is an achievement
 as he's surrounded by obnoxious
 company. But I think Nick Bockwinkel
 is better. He speaks intelligently
 all the time. He's quick, observant
 and imparts lots of knowledge. He
 almost makes his partner tolerable.
 He's a class act in all ways and I
 hope he sits in more in the future.

Hayes can be fun, but he's sometimes
 annoying. He's more there to work
 in angles and get heat. Having
 to "play the role" detracts from
 what's needed to make a truly great
 color commentator.

GARY ZIMAK: Hayes is fabulous.
 He's an expert and tailoring his
 comments around the matches as
 opposed to cracking jokes that have
 nothing to do with what's going on.

STRONGEST WRESTLER

1. ROAD WARRIOR ANIMAL.....150
 2. Steve Williams.....123
 3. Road Warrior Hawk.....6

Previous winners

1981 - Tony Atlas
 1982 - Ken Patera
 1983 - Hulk Hogan
 1984 - Butch Reed
 1985 - Road Warrior Animal

READERS' FAVORITE WRESTLER

1. RIC FLAIR.....96
 2. Bruiser Brody.....18
 3. Roddy Piper.....16
 Other contenders: Nobuhiko Takada
 13, Road Warrior Hawk 13, Jake
 Roberts 12, Ted DiBiase 12, Jerry
 Lawler 12, Terry Gordy 9, Terry Funk
 9, Ricky Steamboat 7, Jim Duggan 7,
 Steve Williams 7, Bruno Sammartino 7,
 Kuniaki Kobayashi 7

Previous winners 1984 - Ric Flair

1985 - Ric Flair

READERS' LEAST FAVORITE WRESTLER

1. HULK HOGAN.....85
 2. Dusty Rhodes.....54
 3. Junkyard Dog.....16
 Other contenders: Mike Von Erich 13,
 Honkeytonk Man 12, Jimmy Valiant 11,
 Ron Garvin 9, Andre the Giant 9,
 Hilbilly Jim 7, Lance Von Erich 6

Previous winners 1984 - Ivan Putski

1985 - Hulk Hogan

WORST WRESTLER (ROOKIES INELIGIBLE)

1. MIKE VON ERICH.....49
 2. Andre the Giant.....33
 3. Jimmy Valiant.....26
 Other contenders: Hulk Hogan 22,
 Lance Von Erich 22, Uncle Elmer 21,
 George Steele 15, Rufus Jones 14,
 Junkyard Dog 14, Honkeytonk Man 14,
 Dusty Rhodes 12, John Studd 9, Ab-
 dullah the Butcher 9, Dan Spivey 6

Previous winners 1984-Ivan Putski
1985 - Uncle Elmer

MR. MIKE: Who are the select legion of Stiffs that due to poor act, poor athlete or embarrassment cause me to walk out of the arena or switch off the VCR? Buck Zumhofe, Jimmy Valiant, Kimala and Ivan Putski come immediately to mind. Putski is my most hated. The grinning geektoid doesn't even try, and fortunately, seems to have run out of places to infect. Now Lance Von Erich has improved a lot since 1985, and he's still stiff, graceless and untalented enough for three guys.

JOHN JANCE: Fortunately, Silo Sam isn't permitted to work much. But having seen him once, it was enough to convince me he deserves the award.

KURT BROWN: Lance Von Erich is the worst, and also the most feared due to clumsiness.

RYAN CLARK: I chose Jimmy Valiant because he gets blown up just dancing on his way to the ring; wins with an elbow drop that misses by a foot; and makes Rhodes look decent.

WORST TAG TEAM

1. JUNKYARD DOG/GEORGE STEELE....70
 2. Lance/Mike Von Erich.....42
 3. Mike Rotundo/Dan Spivey.....22
- Other contenders: King Kong Bundy & John Studd 20, Bladerunners 18, Kareem Muhammad & Ed Gammner 12, Lance Von Erich & Dingo Warrior 9, Moondogs 7, New Guinea Headhunters 6

Previous winners 1984-Crusher & Baron Von Raschke
1985 - Uncle Elmer & Cousin Junior

MR. MIKE: Individually Mike and Lance Von Erich are appalling. Together they have some sort of a negative synergism, that is, the sum being less than the parts. Them, combined will Bill Mercer on fall-by-fall, is memorable. They're supposedly over (sure, check the crowds) and at or near the top of the promotion.

WORST TELEVISION SHOW

1. CALIFORNIA CHAMPIONSHIP.....127
 2. AWA on ESPN.....67
 3. World Class.....33
- Other contenders: Wrestling TNT 14, Big-Time Wrestling (Portland) 13, WWF Wrestling Challenge 12, Crockett Worldwide 7, Crockett WTBS 7, WWF Superstars 7, ICW 7, Bruiser Bedlam 6, Prime Time Wrestling 6, Tomko 6, All American Wrestling 6, GLOW 6

Previous winners 1984-WWF All-Star Wrestling
1985 - Championship Wrestling from Florida

WORST MANAGER

1. PAUL JONES.....97
2. Sheik Adnan El Kaissey.....45

Mr. Fuji.....45
Other contenders: Slick 37, Lou Albano 20, The Wizard 20, Percy Pringle 16, Sir Oliver Humperdink 7, Fred Blassie 7

Previous winners

1984 - Mr. Fuji

1985 - Mr. Fuji

MR. MIKE: Who is dull, useless, stale beyond belief, not a draw, unintelligible, a silly ethnic slur and the AWA's only manager? Sounds like ol' Adnan El-Kaissey to me. He's being used at his best right now. Nobody to manage. Unable to wrestle. Largely out of sight. Ol' Ad wins the "Most times beaten up in a cage at springtime by a first-born male Gagne settling absolutely nothing to the point of nausea " award.

WORST MATCH OF THE YEAR

1. RODDY PIPER -vs- MR. T.....196
- 4-7 Uniondale, N.Y.
2. Hulk Hogan -vs- King Kong Bundy
- 4-7 Los Angeles.....15
3. Don Muraco -vs- Paul Orndorff
- 4-7 Uniondale, N.Y.....14

Other contenders: Kevin Von Erich vs. Black Bart 10-12 Dallas 11, Machines vs. King Kong Buddy-John Studd 8-25 New York 6, Antonio Inoki vs. Leon Spinks 10-9 Tokyo 6

Previous winners

1984 - Fabulous Moolah vs. Wendi Richter from New York

1985 - Lou Albano vs. Fred Blassie from Uniondale, N.Y.

MR. MIKE: I'm not going to pick Roddy Piper vs. Mr. T--the single biggest abortion of all-time, simply because it wasn't a wrestling match. And I'd rather simply forget the pathetic set up bout of T vs. Bob Orton. I'm picking the Saturday Night Main Event of The Funks vs. Hulk Hogan and The Junklike Log. Having to sit there and watch the Funks, Terry especially, sell his ass, and his knees off, making those two utterly contemptable, lazy, over-bearing, blown up, repulsive media stars look like wrestlers was too much to take. With the added high concept Haiti Kid hijinx shoved at us like guano, this match left a taste in my mouth that I expect to expectorate for many more months to come. It was the wrestling low point of the year.

DAVE KATZ: How about the entire American Bash tour? What a disappointment.

RYAN CLARK: Knowing full well that Mr. T vs. Roddy Piper will win, and rightfully so, I wanted to cast a vote for Antonio Inoki vs. Leon Spinks. If you were teetering on the edge, how much sense does it take to put your future in the hands of Leon Spinks? Both McMahon and Inoki were idiots in bringing in non-

wrestlers in critical matches. But unlike T, who was just out of shape, Spinks was simply a moron. At least Mr. T can remember his lines and football players can remember their plays. Leon? He can't even remember to duck...or kick out.

KIM WOOD: Andre vs. Bundy. I was there and actually paid money to see it. Words cannot describe it.

ROBERT STRAUSS: Piper vs. T was the worst match of this or any other year.

LARRY LOVELL: I knew Piper vs. T would be bad...just didn't know it would be that bad.

GARY ZIMAK: I have no idea why I watched Hogan vs. Bundy from Wrestlemania. A complete dud in every way. My favorite part was when Bundy juiced and was said to be "bleeding profusely." I've cut myself worse shaving. The reason I didn't pick Piper vs. T was because I refused to watch it. I can't stand that goof on television. I wasn't about to watch him box Piper.

WORST FEUD OF THE YEAR

1. MACHINES -vs- BUNDY-STUDD.....72
 2. Valiant -vs- Jones.....43
 3. Hall -vs- DeBeers.....30
- Other top contenders: Paul Orndorff vs. Don Muraco 27, Randy Savage vs. George Steele 19, Ric Flair vs. Dusty Rhodes 12, Magnum T.A. vs. Nikita Koloff 8

Previous winners

- 1984 - Andre the Giant vs. John Studd
1985 - Sgt. Slaughter vs. Boris Zhukov

MR. MIKE: The potential is greater than ever here, with restricted talent exchange and wrestlers getting pushed prematurely.

There were some absolute klinkers-- Muraco vs. Orndorff (did it even happen?), Savage vs. Steele (a criminal waste of talent), the insufferable Jimmy Valiant vs. Paul Jones, etc.

But a worst feud is the product of bad booking, bad workers, bad taste and bad luck. The matches should be bad, and the effect on the gate equally bad. They should also be foisted upon the public as a top, or near top draw.

I'll pick the AWA (Anemic Wrestling Angles), where the complaint by the fans usually is there are no feuds, but when you think about it, the inept fools have feuds all the time--just that nobody cares about them. Larry Zbyszko works terrible matches and can't draw, so he threatens with his series with Scott LeDoux or Nick Bockwinkel. If Sgt. Slaughter was supposed to feud with anyone this year, he didn't stay around long enough to find out. At least the fans were spared.

But one fizzled attempt at a feud stands out--Bockwinkel vs. Nord the Barbarian. The whole thing was awful, uninteresting, inconsequential, and quickly forgotten. There was no logic, and no interest. What makes it the top choice, however, were the contributions by one John

Nord. He is, without question, not only utterly awful, but he's impossible to have a match with. He's big and he barks, but that's all. The matches I saw were totally silent of any fan reaction. Absolutely frigid.

JEFF BOWDREN: There were many bad ones, but the worst was Lex Luger vs. Ed "The Bull" Gantner. First, you had two of the greenest stiffes in the business. Both were guys who were being pushed before they were ready, and the promotion tried to make people interested in it. Thankfully it didn't work. No heat. No action. No ability. Nothing.

WORST ON INTERVIEWS

1. MIKE VON ERICH.....78
 2. Jimmy Snuka.....71
 3. Kendall Windham.....18
- Honorable Mention: Ron Garvin 12, Denny Brown 11, Lance Von Erich 8, Tommy Rich 7, Robert Gibson 7, Rick Rood 6

Previous winners

- 1984 - Jimmy Snuka
1985 - Thunderbolt Patterson

MR. MIKE: My heroes, the Von Erichs, come to mind again. That dynamic duo of Lance and Mike seem so lost when trying to verbalize a cogent thought--their likely unfamiliarity with any is no doubt the reason. I'll pick Lance, that smooth smiling son-of-a-gun. He has trouble even remembering who he's feuding with. At least Jimmy Snuka has been publicly certified as a basket case.

GARY ZIMAK: Mike Von Erich talks about as well as he wrestles. Denny Brown could be a candidate, but fortunately he isn't interviewed very often. Do you realize that the next intelligent sentence he says will be his first?

BEST VALET

1. MISSY HYATT.....169
 2. Precious.....97
 3. Baby Doll.....14
- Honorable Mention: Elizabeth 10, Dark Journey 9, Linda Street 6

MR. MIKE: A narrow field because you need a candidate that looks good, serves a function, and gets heat.

I can only think of four that come close to qualifying--Missy Hyatt, Dark Journey, Precious and Baby Doll. Baby Doll was the most valuable for most of the year, then her role was changed and her angle was killed prematurely. Precious has no angle, but does the job well and gets a good reaction. But the best, or best used or potential to be used (in wrestling angles, I mean) is Missy Hyatt.

RYAN CLARK: Baby Doll has the best belly-to-belly suplex, but Missy Hyatt is the best valet.

JEFF BOWDREN: Too many people think of who is the best looking, but I don't think that has anything to do with it. However the best at creating heat is Precious.

GARY ZIMAK: I think Precious is

tremendous, but I get the feeling people pay more attention to Missy. She is a very effective bitch and she has a much more prominent role.

WORST VALET

1. ELIZABETH.....68
- SUNSHINE.....68

3. Brenda Britton.....42

Honorable Mention: Dark Journey
25, Raven Road 21, Honey 11, Baby Doll 10

Honey out of Calgary is the worst. She looks cheap, has no purpose and has helium between her ears. Whenever she walks, I'd swear I can hear her two marbles klunk together. But she was involved in two of the funnier incidents I saw this past year. One was when the announcers were cutting down her lack of intelligence, and the Angel of Death spoke up for her and said she's got a PHD--in sex education. The other was on a poor man's version of Piper's Pit with Mike Hammer, who does the drag queen routine as Michelle Hammer, and Michelle goes to Honey and asks "girl-to-girl" what the "inside" scoop is on the various heels.

MR. MIKE: A valet should not be dull, boring, unattractive or embarrassing to the promotion. Some become offensive because they are stale (Sunshine). Some look like their appeal is limited to readers of fetish magazines (Dolly Parker, Fantasy). But one transcends all that. It's the bizarre Miss Brenda Britton, who is not, I repeat, not, a fleabag. However what kind of a bag she is I won't even begin to speculate.

GARY ZIMAK: Sunshine is colorless and has no impact.

JEFF BOWDREN: If creating heat is the idea, the opposite of that is Elizabeth. She does nothing but sit there and look good. Of course, that's exactly what's expected of her so I don't know if you can blame her.

WORST PROMOTION

1. AWA.....84
2. California Championship.....78

3. World Class.....64

Honorable Mention: WWF 33, Portland 9, ICW 6, Tomko 6

There's only one choice for me--World Class. The AWA at least tried, and lucked into one good feud. Even at their worst, they generally had a half dozen pretty competent workers around. Their World champions were at least highly regarded wrestlers. Not so in World Class, with the most pathetic contingent of main eventers on the planet. If he can't work, he's main eventing for World Class. How can you even try to have good matches with the likes of Abdullah the Butcher, Dingo Warrior, Kevin and the entire Von Erich family, Tony Atlas. It was a disaster from the word go.

GARY ZIMAK: If you enjoy total lies, poor taste and even poorer talent, then World Class is the promotion for you. They just make me gag. Hiding behind a religious front and pulling the crap they do is the ultimate insult to the fans.

JEFF BOWDREN: Within the last year, Verne has lost the following wrestlers: Freebirds, Road Warriors, Rick Martel, Jimmy Garvin, Stan Hansen, Bruiser Brody, John Nord along with losing probably the most solid promotional base in the country.

BEST BOOKER

1. DUSTY RHODES.....118

2. Ken Mantell.....111

3. Bill Dundee.....29

Honorable Mention: Jerry Lawler 28

It's hard to deny Dusty Rhodes has had one heck of a year. He was running hot angles, a mile a minute early in the year, seemed to have gotten a case of writers' cramp, but has recovered and has been able to almost completely offset the fact the faces at the top almost never really change. Contrast this with Titan, which has brought in dozens of new wrestlers, yet appears stale most of the time.

MR. MIKE: Despise his very existence as I might, Rhodes was the best this year. Mantell is good, but his talent mix is stale, and they are using too many Texas 1983 angles. Rhodes was at his speak before the summer, and mixed his top-name talent better than anyone else. Of course he does have largely an excellent cast to work with, with one key exception. His major failing as a booker, and a human being, is himself, but we've all heard that before.

JEFF BOWDREN: Dusty let the talent get too stake and focused too much attention on himself. Baba's feuds have also gotten stale while Inoki, like Dusty, works everything around himself. I'll pick Jerry Lawler. For a circuit with no talent, he's still able to draw a few thousand a week in Memphis. He's also been able to fend off Titan, Crockett and Watts this past year.

BEST GIMMICK PERFORMER

1. ADRIAN STREET.....36

2. Jake Roberts.....30

3. Big Bubba Rogers.....27

Missing Link.....27

Honorable Mention: Kevin Sullivan 21, Road Warriors 20, Col. DeBeers 18, Kimala 13, Jim Cornette 9, Randy Savage 9, Jimmy Garvin 8

Big Bubba Rogers has an awful lot of heat for a guy who basically has done nothing. But I'm torn at the top between two, one of which I can't stand (Kimala) and the other which has been ultra-successful (Road Warriors). Nevertheless, the Road Warriors do possess some talent, so my pick is Kimala. Can you imagine if he didn't show up in Memphis after Jerry Lawler had read some books on

African art where Jim Harris would be today?

MR. MIKE: I think it has got to be the Road Warriors. If Hogan's gimmick is being a bronzed media creation that looks like a wrestler, then he does it well. The Roadies started as all gimmick, and only incidentally became okay wrestlers. But they've hit so immediately and so strong that they've started a trend (not a plus, but that's life).

GARY ZIMAK: Kimala certainly has gained a lot of mileage from his gimmick. Unfortunately this doesn't say much for the intelligence of wrestling fans.

RYAN CLARK: Road Warriors. The gimmick? To appear indestructible. I'd say these guys execute that gimmick very well.

WORST GIMMICK PERFORMER

1. ADRIAN ADONIS.....70
2. Honkeytonk Man.....48
3. George Steele.....40
- Honorable Mention: Giant Machine 12, Harley Race 15, Corporal Kirchner 8, Junkyard Dog 6, Abdullah the Butcher 6

There is no single more pathetic sight in pro wrestling than poor Harley Race going out as a clown. He gave too many good performances during his era.

MR. MIKE: From the first video look I had of Kimala, around 1982, I've been uneasy about being a wrestling fan. How they could, and more incredibly, have, put this sick freak spectacle over in our "sophisticated" age amazed me. One of the most poor-tasted gimmicks of all-time. The fact Jim Harris is a terrible wrestler makes it even worse. It was an okay gag in Memphis, but it should have been laid to rest a month later.

GARY ZIMAK: Baron Von Raschke--for one thing, hatred toward Germans has been dead for a decade. In addition, he no longer belongs in the ring. I can't take this guy seriously. That is all the people need to know.

MOST EMBARRASSING WRESTLER

1. ADRIAN ADONIS.....50
2. Mike Von Erich.....34
- George Steele.....34
- Honorable Mention: Jimmy Valiant 31, Uncle Elmer 26, Baron Von Raschke 10, Honkeytonk Man 9, Abdullah the Butcher 9, Kimala 9, Silo Sam 8

Putting over Mike Von Erich, in fact, even letting him back in the ring, is shameful. But everytime I watch George Steele, it's just not for me. It's the kind of a gimmick I'd have loved as a kid, but the thought of a 50-year-old former school teacher having to run all over the country and play mental retard is sad. He might be laughing to the bank, but what is he doing the other 23 hours a day when he's not near a bank?

MR. MIKE: That darling of dermatology, Abdullah the Butcher, so perversely fascinating as a sideshow freak makes me proud to be a wrestling fan, so long as nobody I want to respect me knows about it.

JEFF BOWDREN: The guy who makes me cringe when a non-wrestling fan enters the room is George Steele. Trying to explain to a non-fan that this normal guy is playing retard for mongoloids to make a living is more than a little embarrassing.

GARY ZIMAK: Just one question. How do you possibly explain Adrian Adonis to a friend who doesn't watch wrestling? A faggot act is bad enough. But a fat faggot is too much.

KIM WOOD: The boy with the frisbees and the poems.

THE B-TEAM

Has anyone else out there seen previews of the series NBC is using to replace the A-Team? It stars our buddy Virgil and is called, "Bleed, Dusty, Bleed!" The bit I saw has Dusty working in a diner and when a customer comes in and says, "I want juice," the waitress tries to shut him up. Too late. Dusty overhears it and hits a gusher.

I also wonder if you could confirm the rumors I've heard about Wrestlemania III? Is it true they moved the date to Easter? I heard they were going to nail Hogan to a cross on one of their Saturday Night Main Events, and then a week later at Wrestlemania, he gets resurrected.

Travis McAlester
Setauket, New York

NOT ANOTHER QUIZ

A current wrestling promoter won a varsity letter in basketball at a perennial top 20 major college. Name the promoter, the college and the coach at the time.

CLUE NO. 1 - The promoter runs a promotion founded by his father, who passed away in the last couple of years.

CLUE NO. 2 - The college has won an NCAA Division I title and been to the final four at least one other time in the past 10 years.

CLUE NO. 3 - In the last 18 months, this promoter was involved in a lawsuit where two promoters sued another rival promoter over exclusive use of a building.

CLUE NO. 4 - In the last 10 years, this college has had five players either be the No. 1 pick in the NBA draft or win NBA rookie of the year awards.

CLUE NO. 5 - While this promoter is not a major promoter, he is affiliated with one of the big three.

CLUE NO. 6 - The coach is one of only two men to play on an NCAA champion, coach an NCAA champion, coach an NTJ champion and coach the U.S. to a gold medal in basketball at the Olympics.

THE READERS' PAGES

I've heard so much of late about the 60 minute TV draw between Curt Hennig and Nick Bockwinkel that I'd better try and watch it. If someone has a tape of the match, contact me and we'll work out a trade. . . The Stampede Wrestling Camp will be re-opening in mid-February under head coach Brian Pillman. Dynamite Kid will be in as a guest coach for this session. For more info write Stampede Wrestling Training Camp, P.O. Box 274, Midnapore, Alberta T0L 1J0 or call 403-247-6274. A couple of other U.S. camps that I know of are run by Eddie Sharkey and Larry Sharpe. For details on Sharkey's camp, write c/o Marvin Joel, P.O. Box 3845, Minneapolis, MN. For details on Sharpe's Monster Factory, write 118 Stanley Ave., Westville, NJ 08093. . .

WHAT MAKES A GOOD WRESTLING CARD

A good wrestling card is made up of several familiar personalities and a couple of new faces matched up, competitively in most cases, and so one person can impressively dominate in the remaining matches. These matches should not be excessively long or short. Variety should be the key in promotion. However, fans should be able to predict the outcome of most, but not all the matches.

Every good card must have one match that creates controversy and conflict that gives the spectators reason to come back next time. The same show must also have a match that satisfactorily resolves a similar conflict, and justifies to the spectator why it was important he attend that show.

A good promotion is similar to a good soap opera, creating a continuing story involving many personalities, who are, in some cases, easy to like, and in other cases, easy to hate. These personalities should exhibit strength, fluidity of motion, skill and knowledge of how to attack and render helpless an opponent.

Matches should make sense and be believable. Consistency is important. If fans see one wrestler defeat six different opponents with six different moves, then use all six on a seventh opponent without being able to obtain victory, it neither makes sense nor is believable.

Fans deserve to get their money's worth. Shows should not be too short. Ticket prices should reflect the value of what a customer gets. He should be getting entertainment, not disappointment with too many disqualifications and unsatisfactory endings.

The use of blood in matches should make sense to the story line, and not be used in place of a story line. Too much blood, like too many disqualifications, non-endings, one-sided matches, or heel victories becomes boring.

The one thing I would immediately change if it were left up to me about wrestling would be return to having two of three fall tag team matches.

It's very difficult to pinpoint times or eras or judge between pre-post 1983, as to when fans were better off. The current era is better because promoters have to care more about making their fans happy. On the other hand, so many promotions and so much television has made it difficult to provide enough variety and tends to create a stale atmosphere.

Ron Dobratz
Roscoe, Illinois

QUESTIONS

Do you see anybody in the next five years coming into Jarrett's area to challenge him and at least hold their ground? What is it that makes Jerry Lawler work so well in this area? If you had to pick one thing, what was it that brought Verne Gagne's downfall? With all the news lately of steroids, do you see pro wrestling cleaning itself up? Do you see a reduction in steroid usage? Do you think Vince can afford to go with four shows a night, and for how long?

The WWF is hurting here. As of 12/20, they had sold less than 1,000 tickets to the 12/26 show. They were forced to take out an ad in the Sunday newspaper. They did, as it turned out, draw 4,000 or 4,500. They also had to cut into commentary for localized voice-over plugs. They hadn't taken out an ad in the newspaper since Bob Backlund was champ. Then on 12/26, they announced the Bulldogs for the next show. This will help keep the crowds down. Crockett could easily make it here.

Jay Steele
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

DM: Five years is a long time, and I seriously doubt it will take that long for someone to give Jarrett a stiff challenge. Right now, except for Memphis, WWF could probably go into any of their cities and outdraw them with the "C" team. With the "B" team, or Hogan, they could outdraw them anywhere except Memphis, and they could draw 4-5,000 there. I'm sure Watts is going to try in that area again as well. Lawler has the advantage of about 15 years of television exposure on his side, plus they've promoted a style of wrestling there unlike any other in the country. They have a familiarity with their audience, but unless they have some talent as well, that won't be enough to head off opposition--and you can't keep talent unless you pay them. Jarrett's basic philosophy of keeping the costs down to a minimum (low payoffs) keeps

the company doing well financially, but works against them in keeping talent. If I had to pick one reason for Verne Gagne's downfall, it would be competition. Verne had a monopoly in some very good cities, so he didn't have to do a good job to make money. Once competition exposed his weaknesses both in promotion to the public, and the way he treated his wrestlers so the good ones had an option to go elsewhere, the promotion started to crumble. Professional wrestling can't afford to clean itself up as far as steroids, though I certainly wish it would. Several wrestlers are "over" big, simply through their steroid physiques. How many of them would have the guts to go the route Sting has--basically give up the massive physique for a natural physique, and try to make it on ability? Size is such an important factor in being believable to fans, getting pushed, and just getting work, that drugs which add size, as harmful as they may be, will naturally be heavily involved in this business. Wrestlers have a tendency not to think about their future, and that's the insidious thing about steroids. Much of the damage is long-term, most of the gains are short-term--thus the first reactions you get are generally positive, which encourages greater use, psychological addiction, and presto, your health could be in danger.

CONCERNING WRESTLING EYE

Your comments about Mike Bellew and Wrestling Eye weren't in poor taste. They are the reason your newsletter is so good. You are not afraid to give your honest opinion. But I do think you were too rough on Bellew and Wrestling Eye.

You have mentioned that wrestling is a business. So is publishing. The early Wrestling Eyes contained a lot of background and other information not available previously to the serious fan, at least in over-the-counter magazines. Somewhere along the way, they turned into a comic book like most wrestling magazines. Was it pressure from the promoters or the need to do so to be financially successful that changed the format?

In the Fan Club column, Wrestling Observer is rated at the top in each issue. It is always said that casual fans should not purchase the newsletter.

Tom Nagos
Chico, California

AND MORE

In response to your Wrestling Eye comment--their readers must be the most confused people in the U.S. I find the magazine fascinating for the outrageous contradictions it presented in each and every issue. The latest issue has several references to angles being set up and champions chosen by promoters, yet has a super-straight article on recent title matches ("Bockwinkel opened with an arm-bar hammerlock series"). It also has an editorial lauding the WWF for training referees. If Titan is training officials, it's undoubtedly in the interest of perfecting the airplane spin referee bump so it looks smooth on tour. The editorial claims state athletic commissioners often lose control of matches. Is wrestling fake? It depends on what page of the magazine you are reading.

I agree that the article on wrestling jargon didn't belong in the magazine, but my reason is different than yours. I can't imagine more than a handful of people that could even make sense of such a poorly written article. Wrestling Eye still seems to be the only magazine even aiming at journalism, using real names and real backgrounds, but it's annoyingly inconsistent in its perspective. The Apter mags follow the same policy they have for years. Get great pictures and slap any kind of story around them because fans can't read anyway. They also blatantly shill for any group that cooperates with them.

John Mehno
Baden, Pennsylvania

AND MORE

Frankly I'm surprised at the way you handled the passing of Wrestling Eye editor Mike Bellew in the 1/5 Observer. While I never knew Mike, and can count on one hand the number of times I've even looked at Wrestling Eye, neither of these points have as little to do with the situation as the controversial article they ran recently.

There were two separate news items here. On one hand, a young man's life was tragically snuffed out at the age of 27. On the other, an article was run in a newsstand wrestling publication that shouldn't have been. You could have at least separated the two stories with a paragraph break.

To gloss over Bellew's "real-life" death in one-and-a-half sentences--only to spend practically the next quarter-page lambasting Wrestling Eye is a lack of editorial discretion as shameful as Crockett and Fritz using Terry Allen and David Von Erich's real-life tragedies to sell wrestling tickets, which also you shook a reprimanding finger at once again in the very same Observer.

Let's try and remember that promoters and Dusty Rhodes aren't the only ones that allow the line between wrestling and reality to blur.

Jeff Siegel
Evanston, Illinois

AND MORE

I don't think your comments were out of line at all. The problem with Wrestling Eye is that it can't decide what kind of a magazine it wants to be or how straight it wants to report the news. Before reading the Observer, Wrestling Eye was my only source of real information. Thank you Ed Garea and the Phantom of the ring. So, despite wretched printing, incompetent production foul-ups, it was invaluable for someone with an IQ. You'd learn more from an Ed Garea article than from months of the more slickly produced Apter magazines.

Dwight Decker
Northlake, Illinois

AND FINALLY

When wrestling magazines and newspaper articles print behind-the-scenes stories, it hurts the business rather than helps it. A great deal of fans believe wrestling is 100 percent authentic. These fans will fight to the death to prove their adversaries wrong. I can guarantee these fans won't take kindly to having been made fools of throughout their lives when they read in a newspaper that a wrestler was injured so he could take a vacation or tour Japan.

I feel wrestling can't survive if every fan knew wrestling wasn't on the level. When I attend matches, I speak to several fans. When asking them if wrestling is fake, some answer it's half real, half fake. Others say it's all real. Others will have different percentages. Few will say it's 100 percent fake. These are the fans that keep wrestling alive, not die-hards like us. Wrestling could survive without us. But could wrestling survive without them?

I think journalists should refrain from printing your behind-the-scenes stories in newspapers and wrestling magazines. If wrestling fans are interested in this sort of thing, then the journalists should simply print details on how to get the newsletter.

Jesse Reyes
San Antonio, Texas

DM: I opened up a can of worms here. There are another dozen letters similar to these on my desk as well. Thanks to everyone for the comments.

WATTS SHOULD HAVE KEPT FANTASTICS

As an avid UWF fan, I'm not sure Bill Watts did the right thing in letting the Fantastics go. With the UWF mainly running split cards, he could use two babyface pretty-boy teams. It is known the UWF wants the Midnight Rockers, so they could use the Rockers on one card and the Fantastics on the other. For the Fantastics to have become a squash team would have been foolish. I'm sure most of the other promotions like Memphis, Alabama, World Class or Florida could and would push these guys as they have a good work-rate and good ability. If they end up with World Class, they deserve better. And if they go there, it will slow down the UWF's expansion into Texas.

I wonder how long Jim Duggan will want to stay with the WWF. I figure he'll end up like Dick Slater, Tito Santana, Jesse Barr and so many others who get lost in the shuffle there. How long will Duggan's ego allow him to work for a promotion where he isn't a top dog?

Since October, the UWF has lost Duggan, Fantastics, Joe Savoldi, Buddy Landel, John Tatum and Chris Adams. In my book, this isn't expansion.

Bob Ivy
Louisville, Mississippi

DM: With the exception of the Fantastics, virtually the rest of the losses were via circumstances beyond their control. I'm not really sure the UWF would want the Rockers, either. Copied gimmicks in the same area where they have seen the real thing often doesn't work. For instance, besides the Fabs, and Rock'n'Roll, they've tried a million of these types, including Fantastics in Memphis and none got over. There were some cities in UWF the Fantastics never could get over in because the fans wanted the Rock'n'Roll. I don't think they could make the same gimmick work with a copycat team, which is what the fans surely would view the Rockers as.

WHO ARE MAXX BROTHERS?

Who are the Maxx brothers? Also, California Wrestling talks about The Sheik and Billy Graham coming in. Are they? The best I can figure is the tapes now on cable are old, just recut to look new. Also, is Lock Paul Vachon's daughter or a Windham?

Ray Whebbe Jr.
St. Paul, Minnesota

DM: Madd Max is John Richmond, who now is in UWF as Eli the Eliminator. Super Max is Sammy Darrow. Those CCW tapes were from 1985. Graham came in. I don't think Sheik did. Lock is a Windham. Her tag partner Luna is a Vachon

MEXICAN WRESTLING ON IN NEW YORK

channel 41, one of the metropolitan New York area's spanish language UHF stations runs tapes from Mexico between 11 and 12 a.m. each Saturday. The program is called "Lucha Libre Arena Calisen." As you have indicated many times, it's hard to find a wrestler who is 6-feet tall or weighs 200 pounds. About half of them are masked. I suspect if the card is a lengthy one, they remove their masks, change their tights and reappear in another mask under a different name.

One match I saw recently as a 6-man tag. There were few wrestling holds. It was mostly acrobatic routines, poorly executed and usual showmanship antics. However, the interesting part is there were two referees, both in the ring at the same time. If a wrestler was thrown out of the ring, or left the ring on his own accord, another member of the team could take his place without tagging. Could you imagine if this rule applied to American matches what they would be like. The masked man on the losing side had to have his mask removed in front of the camera. In more than 30 years of watching wrestling, this was only the third time I've seen this happen.

Howard Siegel
Yonkers, New York

COOL IT ON RACISM

The December 30 issue of Wrestling Forum includes a brilliant essay by Jeff Siegel on racial angles. Siegel asks promoters and bookers to weigh the financial benefits of creating heat against the social costs of exploiting racism in our society. I agree there must be better and more creative ways to boost attendance than by stimulating racial prejudice.

The racism isn't confined to angles. The image projected by the black wrestler, who talks jive, dances in the ring and shows no sign of intelligence, in other words, today's typical black wrestler, is as distasteful as any racial angle. Black fans have nobody who compares with Terry Taylor, Nick Bockwinkel or any number of intelligent white wrestlers. There is no black role model to help erase harmful stereotypes.

For instance, not long ago, the Bruise Brothers were revealed to have "stolen" Eddie Gilbert's portrait on Mid South TV. The crowd cheered the victimization of Gilbert, the heel. But at the same time, the skit supported the notion that blacks are proud to be thieves.

Another example: Almost all black wrestlers use the head-butt. The subtle implication is that black heads contain rocks instead of brains, and the chance of brain injury is irrelevant since they have nothing to injure.

At this time, I can't think of one major black wrestler in the U.S. who performs with the slightest trace of dignity. Last year, Butch Reed would refuse Scandar Akbar's offers to join his stable. In fact, he declined to be represented by any manager. He proudly proclaimed, "Butch Reed stands alone." Today he is the bleached blond "natural" who has rejected his blackness. What a pity.

I'm not suggesting promoters completely cease using all their black clowns. They provide comic relief and in some cases can be entertaining. But I wish we'd see a balance, just as we have with white wrestlers. Let's have blacks with gimmicks other than stupidity, vulgarity and primitiveness.

Jack Ortizano
Athens, Ohio

LIKES WATTS' SHOW

I, like most of the readers, loves the UWF promotion. The only thing I don't like about the two syndicated shows are they tend to repeat things a little too often for my taste. I realize why they do this, but I wish they would tone it down a little. Bill Watts is about as honest as one can get without beginning to reveal the business.

I loved the way Pro Wrestling This Week revealed Dynamite Kid's injury. Do you know why they don't cover the Florida NWA promotion? It seems funny that they cover Deep South Wrestling while ignoring Florida.

John Murton
Chicago, Illinois

DM: The Florida promotion didn't originally want to appear on the show because Hiro Matsuda was afraid his local Tampa TV station wouldn't want clips from the show to appear on a rival station which airs PWTW in the same market. I believe those problems have been worked out and Florida clips will be shown in future weeks.

I want to alert readers of the following top-rate news bulletins. The long-time No.1 wrestling bulletin, Mat Results, 2115 Clifton Ave., Springfield, Ohio 45505 is the best for getting results of virtually every major show in the country. \$2.50 per monthly issue. . . Wrestling Forum, the best new publication I've seen, P.O. Box 65, Knoxville, IL 61448 is \$1.25 for bi-weekly issues. Best photo newsletter is Canadian Championship Wrestling, 448 Jefferson Ave., Winnipeg, Man. R2V 0N2 for \$2.50. . . Premiere Sports at Box 3755, Gaithersburg, MD 20878 \$3 per issue.

THE FANS' SURVEY

Okay, folks, I got in over my head on this one. I expected maybe two dozen letters on this, which I could go through and make some general remarks on what fans want.

I got more like 200 essays, some quite lengthy, some right to the point. The only generality I can get from all this is pro wrestling will never be run by one promotion. If any group ever had the chance, it was Titan about one year ago, but they failed in one key aspect--they didn't give the wrestling fans what they wanted to see. We've gone through this before. This is why Crockett is surviving and flourishing.

But the key to these responses are there is no single type of promotion that will appeal to all fans. Some fans like wrestling specifically for comedy. Some fans hate the comedy. Some like it specifically for blood. Others detest blood. Some like it to see brawling among muscular, brannsed Adonis' (not Adrian, nobody seemed to like him); some go for classic fast-paced move oriented wrestling from athletes, not muscleheads; some care about the quality of action and little else; others care little about action, but mostly for hype.

What I'm going to do is run down eight of the nine questions asked (the other question, what improvements you'd like in the Observer--was read thoroughly and the changes asked for will be taken to heart--hopefully it will result in an improved publication by spring-time), and pick at random, a half-dozen or so responses to it. You'll see similarities and variances in opinions. I'm also leaving names out, since in many cases the writers asked for anonymity.

WHAT ASPECTS OF PRO WRESTLING MOST APPEAL TO YOU?

1. "The excitement of live shows, the characters involved, the daredevil action, the soap opera interplay and not really ever knowing just how an angle will play in a certain market and watching the reaction to it."
2. "Athletic skill, good presence on interviews, good technical production, fresh angles."
3. "Watching talented athletes doing matches containing good wrestling maneuvers; awesome strength displays like the Warriors and Williams; Basically good action and maneuvers, so I like Japanese wrestling the best."
4. "Aside from violence and bloodshed, I think what appeals to me most is that pro wrestling, at least in this part of the country, isn't very appealing to the general public. It allows me to rebel a little. The interviews are often more fun to listen to than the matches are to watch."
5. "Athleticism, theater and the characters; Japanese pro wrestling, Sayama and Bruiser Brody."
6. "I suppose the pro wrestling business fascinates me. I also enjoy the wrestlers' personas. Very little, however, compensates for really well-executed matches."
7. "Ric Flair"

WHAT ASPECTS OF PRO WRESTLING LEAST APPEAL TO YOU?

1. "What appeals to me least is whatever would embarrass me for liking pro wrestling when watching it with non-fans--stuff like Curtis the Wizard, Sika and Kimala (especially Kimala). The often crude and blatant racism; most xenophobic angles; and all the other sociological sickness wrestling is quagmired in--plus the mass mutilation via blading."
2. "Promoters who show utter contempt for the fans' intelligence and taste; Vince McMahon; Tasteless gimmicks; poorly executed skits; six-minute main events; contemptable business ethics; and a total disregard for pro wrestling's past and future."
3. "The use of the blade; embarrassing guys like Kimala, George Steele or Uncle Elmer."
4. "Babyface superheroes; heels who act like bumbling fools instead of holy terrors; I enjoyed the days when a top babyface could lose legitimately to the top heel, or vice versa, and both would still remain on top with their heat intact; I started watching wrestling in Los Angeles with Ernie Ladd as a heel. He came off as mean and dangerous when he'd defeat and torture Mil Mascaras without any outside help; Mascaras obviously didn't lose any popularity, but Ladd got fantastic heat. I also hate announcers who act like fans and cheer on the babyfaces. Crockett and Shrivane are the worst. But remembering Gene LeBelle and Jeff Walton, this is nothing new. Could you imagine turning on a baseball pregame show and seeing the home team broadcaster interviewing the visiting pitcher and saying, "Don't you deny that you purposely walked John Doe last week. If you ask me, those are cowardly tactics."
5. "The lying promoters do. I understand some is needed for the sake of angles, but when a promoter announces wrestlers for a card that he knows well in advance won't be there, that pisses me off."
6. "The every promotion for itself attitude. Little by little this is destroying the business. Blood."
7. "Seeing babyfaces and heels doing cartoons and commercials together."

THINGS YOU'D LIKE TO CHANGE IN WRESTLING, REALISTICALLY, CONSIDERING THE PROFIT MOTIVE

1. "I believe that well promoted junior heavyweights, insulated from the heavyweights and Japanese style wrestlers who emphasize action, acrobatics and skill would go over big. Wrestlers like the Japanese girls being brought over would have enough appeal to be profitable. It seems to me that guys like Dynamite Kid, Chavo Guerrero, etc. are "over," even if they aren't real draws (but honestly, who is a real draw besides Hulk?), because of moves and ability. Billy Robinson drew well for years, with that being his only appeal."
2. "Eliminate the use of playing on fans' sympathy for unfortunate things that may occur to wrestlers outside the ring to sell tickets eg. Magnum, Mike & Kerry Von Erich."
3. "More cooperation between promotions."
4. "Eliminate long-term contracts."
5. "Make rules more uniform, ie over the top rope and cage match rules."
6. "Make the work-rate similar to that in Japan. If that were the case, several top wrestlers might be out of work, but they shouldn't be in the business in the first place. I'd welcome a massive housecleaning."
7. "Absolutely no more blood."

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT USAGE OF BLOOD?

1. "I hate it. It's the geek-show freak-show element of deceptive self-mutilation trickery used to "fool the marks" that is abhorrent. It's no pleasure to watch a relic hemophiliac like Wahoo McDaniel routinely slice up his ugly face. It's like watching a junkie looking for a fresh vein. However I can see the need for it, and properly used, gets genuine heat. It gets cheap heat through overuse. Blood once a night is enough. It should be self-regulated--once per week per guy is enough. I mean, you can practically study anatomy each week on Crockett's show as the gang parade around their festering wounds."
2. "I enjoy blood and the more the better."
3. "I love serious bleeding, especially at the arenas. It adds immeasurably to the realism and hopefully will drive away the teenage girls. But, I can't imagine how any sane individual could blade himself night after night to make a living. Has anyone in the business considered a potential AIDS epidemic? I work in public health and the idea isn't inconceivable."
4. "Blood has its place and in certain situations has to be used, but total bloodbaths, like in The Sheik's days, have no place any longer. Fans are more sophisticated."
5. "Right now blood is used too much, especially by Crockett's guys. It should be limited to grudge or specialty matches such as cage matches or death matches. Ric Flair shouldn't have to bleed just about every night."
6. "I like the usage of blood. When a match is boring, sometimes the blade will save it. The bloodier the match, the better it is. I guess I'm barbaric."
7. "Titan has been successful without much use of blood, but I see it as important. It creates heat. Bloodbaths are the most appealing type of matches to the general fan."

DO YOU ENJOY WRESTLING MORE NOW OR IN 1983

1. "No. I'm seeing more and enjoying it less, largely due to the decline in the quality of the talent at the top, decline in talent exchanges; waste of good talent; staleness and the imminent potential of more of the same."
2. "I enjoyed wrestling more in years past because wrestling was more personal. I think wrestling was better off in 1983."
3. "The mystery has decreased. I've seen too many wrestlers and far too many angles. Wrestling was better off in 1983."
4. "My favorite wrestling era was 1981-84."
5. "The overall quality was better in 1983 than today and almost all but two promotions were a lot better off. Fans were more interested because there was less overkill. All the TV is making it tiresome."
6. "I enjoy it about the same. What I do like more now is the ability to see more wrestlers and more promotions. Wrestling is better off because it is accepted by more of the public. Wrestling and wrestlers are held in high esteem now, and we have to thank Vince McMahon and Hulk Hogan for it. As much as supposed experts rip and ridicule those two, if it were not for those two, these same experts wouldn't be making the money they are today. I do think wrestling may eventually fall prey to overexposure."
7. "We are seeing a lot better matches today than in 1983 because Crockett and Watts have had to compete to survive with a better product. And their wrestling is better than what was around in 1983. I enjoy wrestling more now because of it, however the wrestling business is not better off."

HOW MUCH WRESTLING IS AVAILABLE ON TV IN YOUR AREA--HOW MUCH DO YOU WATCH?

1. "25 hours a week, which isn't too much if you're a blithering retard. I tape 14 hours for later watching and fast-scanning."
2. "With a satellite dish I get every promotion. It's hard to watch them all. I watch WWF if I have time. I love Memphis the best and will always watch it. But I can't get enough."
3. "11 shows and I watch most of them."
4. "Roughly 18 hours per week. I watch five hours (UWF, Crockett and WWF)."

I won't watch the others because of a minor league atmosphere and talent."
5. "12 hours. I go for action (UWF), interviews (Crockett) and information (Pro Wrestling This Week). I'll watch Memphis, since it's a mix of the first two. WWF is on to listen to, but rarely to watch. AWA rarely goes on anymore."

6. "I never watch wrestling on broadcast TV. I get it on tape and the key is the remote fast forward device."

7. "We get eight hours a week. I watch two hours, the WWF Superstars to find out about local cards, and the UWF, because it's the best other show available."

IS PRO WRESTLING A SPORT? ARE WRESTLERS ATHLETES OR ENTERTAINERS?

1. "If a sport doesn't have to be an objective contest, but as most people consider sports, no way." The correct response about whether wrestlers are athletes or entertainers; is most of the time, neither. The best are both. Entertainment is the emphasis, which isn't to say there aren't plenty of incredibly impressive athletes in the business. Actually the athletic ability of some is awesome, and in fact, this element is nowadays actually submerged, which is a legitimate gripe."

2. "I consider wrestling athletic entertainment. Some wrestlers are neither athlete nor entertainer, but generally they are both."

3. "Good pro wrestlers are unique athletes and the art form requires that they be entertainers. But pro wrestling is not a sport."

4. "Pro wrestling is not a sport. It's an athletic soap opera. However, wrestlers are both athletes and entertainers."

5. "I don't consider wrestling a sport. There are some wrestlers who are great entertainers but poor athletes (Jesse Ventura), great athletes but poor entertainers (Bob Backlund), great athletes and great entertainers (Ric Flair), and poor athletes and poor entertainers (Junkyard Dog)."

6. "Pro wrestling is not a sport. Some wrestlers are athletes, some are not. Obese people are not athletes. Some wrestlers are entertainers, some are not. Pro wrestling is entertainment, not sport, but it is at its most entertaining when it appears to be legitimate sport."

7. "I consider pro wrestling a sport. A pre-determined sport, but a sport as well as show, and wrestlers are both athletes and entertainers."

PREDICTIONS FOR FIVE YEARS FROM NOW

1. "I foresee a backlash from the public, possibly due to some sort of a drug scandal, leaving only the hardcore fans once again. In short, wrestling will return to its normal place in society as low-grade entertainment with a cult following. At least that's what I would like to see."

2. "Unfortunately in five years wrestling will be Vince, and maybe Crockett and Watts. The smaller groups will be wiped out. There will be independents, but they will never reach the level of World Class in 1983. That's depressing."

3. "There will only be a few major promotions existing. More creativity will be needed for promotions to profitably exist."

4. "Fans will be smarter and they won't support smaller promotions. Fans will be turned off by superman type wrestlers."

5. "The WWF will control the world with only small independents serving hick towns."

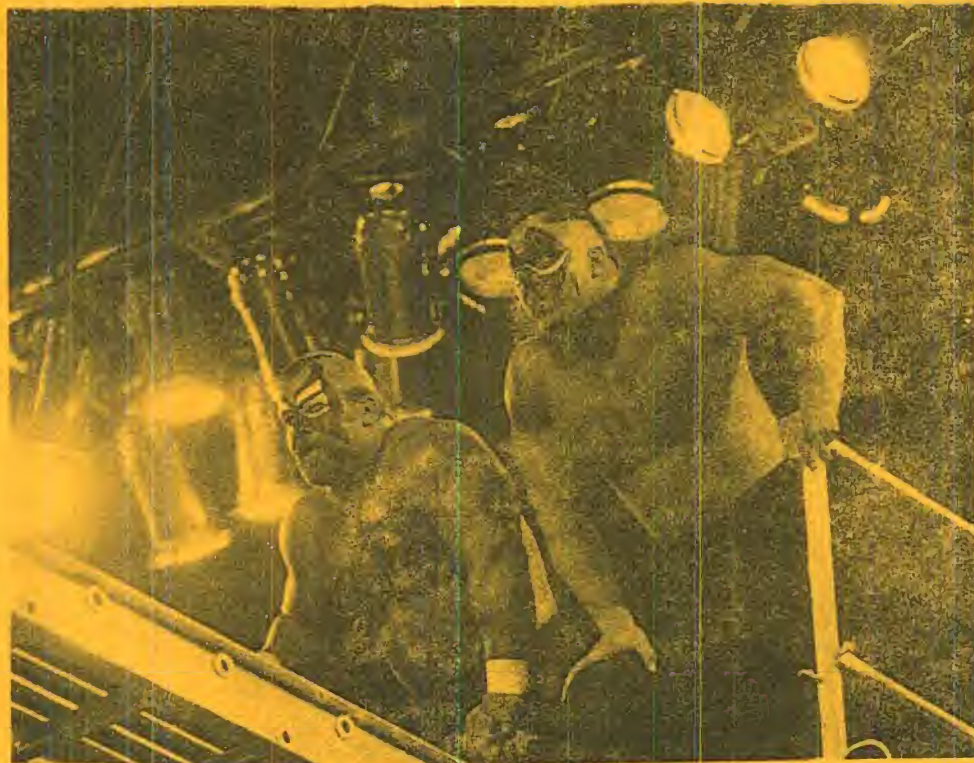
6. "Wrestling will lose some mainstream appeal, but won't be as ignored (or as popular) as it was in the 1970s. Weekly house shows in the same city will be a thing of the past. A new group of promoters will get together and unofficially monopolize everything."

7. "A few promotions will have the entire sport locked up. The smaller circuits won't be able to hold on much longer. The quality of wrestling will reach an all-time high. There will be less wrestlers in the business, but those that survive will be of higher quality. Matches will become more sophisticated and action will increase. When you see matches from the 1950s, or even the 1970s, and compare them with the action today, the difference is like night and day. The matches and holds were so primitive and unexciting that you wonder what the appeal was. The style of wrestling will change, hopefully in five or six years, we'll catch up to what Japan is doing today."

8. "Continued dominance of two or three uncooperating superpromotions. But you can never be sure. What is something tragic were to happen to Flair? Hogan? Williams? Look at what happened to World Class. Who knows, some future all-time great could appear somewhere you least expect him and single-handedly change the balance of power. Where was Crockett before Flair? Vince before Hogan?"

9. "Not much will change. I recently saw a book on sports that included a few pages on pro wrestling. It mentioned wrestling degenerating into blood and brutality, battles between rival promoters trying to break up the big Eastern trust. The book was written in 1937 or 1938. Need I say more."

10. "I believe pro wrestling will be enormously popular again, like it was before it was discovered by the media. The smaller groups will revitalize as well."



1/2 Osaka

Damp was cut her long beauty hair!!

